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There are comparisons of old methods of observance and new, and an entire section devoted to new anniversary days as well as a section on the national American festivals. This is truly a valuable addition to the collection of any Jew with an appreciation of his long heritage.” *The American Hebrew*, April 12, 1940.

JEWISH
CUSTOMS
AND
CEREMONIES

JEWISH CUSTOMS AND CEREMONIES

BY BEN M. EDIDIN
AUTHOR OF "REBUILDING PALESTINE,"
"JEWISH HOLIDAYS AND FESTIVALS"



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To My Daughter

JUDITH MALKAH

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Foreword

“JEWISH Customs and Ceremonies” is a companion to my book to “Jewish Holidays and Festivals,” issued last year. Together, they constitute a comprehensive description of Jewish observance in the home, synagogue and community. While the treatment of the subject is traditional throughout, the writer has been at pains to present the various observances in their historical development and to describe them as religious folkways.

Many Jewish parents are earnestly trying to re-introduce Jewish observance in their homes, particularly for the sake of their children. Other parents are searching for ways to modernize the customs and ceremonies so as to make them more acceptable to the young generation. The two volumes, it is hoped, will prove concretely helpful to parents in both categories.

Teachers in Jewish schools are even more conscious of the need for greater emphasis on Jewish observance. Merely to mention a holiday or a ceremony and to describe it superficially may be less than nothing. The child requires, and deserves, that each festival and custom be treated fully, including historical background, folklore, stories, prayers,

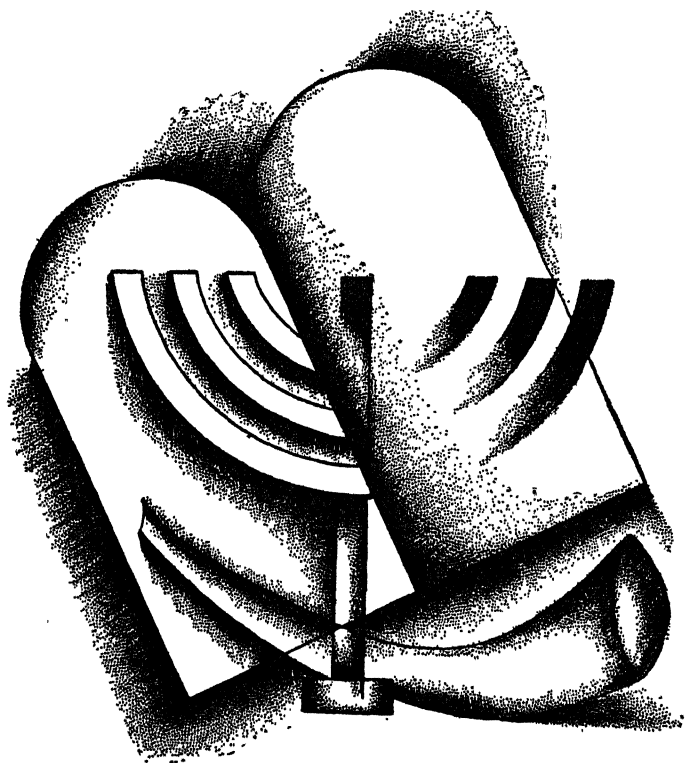
songs, games, dramatizations, and, above all, actual performance. Teachers of all grades will find this book, as well as its companion volume, a handy reference and guide. As a textbook, it is suitable for classes in the junior and senior high schools and may also be used by adult study groups.

The two books are recommended as sources of information and program material for leaders of adolescent and youth clubs. Teachers, parents and leaders are advised to examine the bibliography at the end of the book for a list of useful references, supplementary reading and song books, for various age levels.

I am indebted to a number of individuals for their help in preparing this book. First of all I want to express sincere thanks to my friend and colleague, Dr. Leo L. Honor, for his painstaking reading of the manuscript and for his many enlightening comments and suggestions. I am also grateful to Dr. Julius H. Greenstone and Mr. Israel S. Chipkin for their constructive criticism. To Mr. Ben Rosen and the Associated Talmud Torahs of Philadelphia I am thankful for mimeographing the two volumes in experimental form. Finally I want to thank Mr. H. Norman Tress for the love and care he devoted in making the illustrations, which add so much to the text.

BEN M. EDIDIN

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Chapter One

WHAT OUR CUSTOMS MEAN

A CHILD is born. What joy in the family!

Is it a girl? She must be named, in the synagogue, of course. On the following Sabbath, the father is called up to the Torah, and the infant is given her Jewish name. Is it a

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boy? He must not only be named but also circumcised. The house is crowded with guests who have come for the Brit Milah ceremony. Through this rite the infant is initiated into the Jewish fold. The guests are seated around festive tables, eating, singing, and offering toasts to the happy parents. If the circumcision is performed in a hospital, the party usually takes place the following Saturday or Sunday.

The child has grown into a lad of thirteen. Another joyous ceremony — the BAR MITZVAH — comes to the family. But now the boy himself is old enough to share largely in the happiness of the occasion. Parents spare no effort to make the day one that the son will remember as long as he lives.

The girl has grown up, too. She is to be confirmed. What flutter and fuss! A new dress has to be made, a party arranged, guests invited. After the ceremony, a reception will be held in the synagogue or at home.

Bar Mitzvahs and confirmations are personal events that come only once in the lifetime of a person. There are however, other ceremonies and customs which are observed more frequently. The Sabbath brings rest and joy and beauty each week. The moment mother lights the candles, the house appears different. It would seem as if something new has pervaded the home. Our fore-fathers called it the Sabbath spirit. Supper is not just another meal. Somehow the food tastes better, not to mention the special dishes. With the addition of the songs and chants the meal becomes a little family banquet.

Less frequently, but always welcome, come the holidays and festivals, each in its season, bringing something new into our lives. On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur everyone seems more thoughtful and kindly. There is greater tender-

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ness among brothers, sisters, and friends. In the synagogue a kind of holy atmosphere prevails.

Hanukah brings lights, dreidels and entertainments. With Purim come hamantaschen, masks and carnivals. Hamishah Asar means figs and dates, Palestine songs, Horah dances. Pesach ushers in the beautiful Seder. And as with all the holidays, each one is a significant event in the life of a Jew.

Each holiday has its own ceremonial objects. The Sabbath Menorah, the Seder plate, the Hanukah lamp, the Succot Etrog box, and the other objects serve to beautify the Jewish home every day of the year. They are constant mementos to the family of celebrations enjoyed together and of festive events awaiting them.

Some of the objects are symbols of Jewish home ideals. The Menorah stands for purity as well as unity. The charity-box is a daily reminder of our duty to the less fortunate. The separate sets of dishes have promoted care and self-control in our eating habits. The Bible, found in every good Jewish home, has taught the Jew kindness, honor of parents, hospitality, and other ideals of family life. The Mezuzah is a symbol of peace and devotion in the home.

As in the past, so today, the home is the foundation of Jewish life. The home determines the character of the Jew, his loyalty to the Jewish community, the kind of Jewish education the child receives, and the type of citizen he grows up to be.

Second only to the home is the synagogue as a place of religious observance and as an institution that molds the character of the Jew. Ever since the days of the Second Temple, the synagogue has functioned as a place for worship, for study and for fellowship. During many centuries, it was the very heart of the Jewish community. There,

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young and old came daily to pray and study. There weddings, Bar Mitzvahs and other family events were celebrated. In the synagogue, charity was collected and distributed. From its pulpit, legal decisions were announced.

These are the activities usually found in modern synagogues. However, Jewish life today is different from what it had been, and the synagogue, naturally, has adapted itself to the changed conditions. In fact, we have several kinds of synagogues. But all of them are carrying on the traditional threefold function of worship, study and assembly.

Both in the home and in the synagogue, prayer has been an indispensable part of Jewish life. Early in his history the Jew learned to appreciate the good things in life and to be thankful for them. He also learned to seek in worship consolation and strength in times of adversity. The pious Jew recites a prayer upon awakening in the morning, and immediately before retiring for the night. In addition to the daily ritual, there are special prayers for the holidays, for the personal ceremonies like Bar Mitzvah, and for every special occasion in a person's life. Most of the prayers are religious poems which express the cherished beliefs and aspirations of the Jewish people.

Indeed, many of the most beautiful poems written by Jews during the past three thousand years have been incorporated into the home and synagogue services. But Jewish observance also has been a source of inspiration to musicians and artists. The finest Jewish music we possess is liturgical music. The most tuneful Jewish songs are the holiday songs. This is true also of art, but to a lesser extent. Some of the best known Jewish pictures are paintings of ceremonial scenes, while the most common Jewish decorative

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designs are those inspired by the Menorah, the Shofar and the other ceremonial objects. Novelists, too, have drawn upon the Sabbath, the holidays, and the other customs as themes for interesting and dramatic stories.

To the Jewish people as a whole, the home and synagogue customs have been indispensable as bonds of unity and as forces of survival. In millions of homes, the candles are lighted and the Kiddush is chanted every Friday night. On countless Jewish doorposts, the little Mezuzah bids you welcome. In thousands of synagogues throughout the world, the same prayers are recited and identical portions of the Bible are read. People who observe the same customs naturally feel more strongly united to one another.

Without the binding force of the holidays and ceremonies, it is doubtful whether the Jews could have survived through the centuries, for the observances have served as a means of transmitting and perpetuating the Jewish heritage from generation to generation. Each holiday is a page from the long and eventful history of Israel, and at the same time a symbol of cherished ideals. Pesach, for example, recalls the dramatic Exodus from Egypt, and exemplifies the ideal of liberty. Circumcision reminds us of the Covenant, and of the duties of every Jew toward his faith and his people. The Shofar is reminiscent of the ancient Temple, and at the same time is a symbol of Messianic days when universal peace and brotherhood will reign in the world. Observing the customs has kept alive a knowledge of the Jewish past, and of hopes and ideals for the future.

Jewish observance is now passing through a difficult period, as may be readily seen both in the home and in the synagogue. Failure to realize the significance of the holidays and customs is partly responsible for the lack of devotion to

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them. Practical conditions which grow out of our economic system have been equally potent in weakening Jewish observance. Then, too, the fact that all Jews no longer hold the same views on ritual matters is causing confusion as to what customs and ceremonies are really essential.

On the other hand, there are signs of a recreated interest in these observances. Bar Mitzvah, for example, is emphasized today more than in past generations, even among Reform Jews. New customs are being introduced and old ones modified. Confirmation for girls and the late Friday night services are good illustrations of this trend. In Palestine, where a new Jewish life is developing, old customs are being revived and new ones created. Some of these, like the Purim carnival and the Shavuot First Fruits ceremonial, are being adopted by American Jews.

The Jews are an old, experienced people. Many times in the past they succeeded in adapting themselves to new conditions without abandoning their essential observances. Surely the Jews of this generation, too, will find the way. For we can hardly imagine Jewish life without the Sabbath, the holidays, and the other religious and national customs observed in the home, in the synagogue, and in other Jewish institutions.



Chapter Two

THE JEWISH HOME

HOME is the place where we observe most of our customs and ceremonies. Here we absorb many ideas and facts about Jewish life, read Jewish books, and sing Jewish songs. The kind of Jews and citizens we grow up to be depends largely on the home.

Jews have always treasured home and family as the foun-

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dations of the good life and of the ideals of Judaism. As far back as three thousand years ago, one of the Ten Commandments bade the Jew honor his father and mother. Many of the customs we have today, which serve to strengthen and beautify home life, became part of the Jewish religion because our forefathers were so anxious to lead an ideal family existence. Indeed, the Jewish home has enabled Israel to survive in spite of wandering and persecution during the long centuries. No wonder the Hebrew expression for a good Jewish home is *BAYIT NE-EMAN BE-YISRAEL*, a true home in Israel.

HOME LIFE THEN AND NOW

The modern Jewish home, of course, is different from those of our ancestors in many respects. In the days of Abraham home was but a tent. The family included also married sons and their wives and children, unmarried relatives, together with slaves. It was a large family, a clan. When the Jews settled in Palestine, they built permanent homes of clay, bricks, and stone. The family, however, remained nearly as extensive as before. But now the head of the family did not have as much power to make and enforce laws as heretofore.

Home in those days was also the place of work. Since the majority of the Jews were farmers, they worked in and around the house, producing and making practically everything they needed on the premises. Artisans too did their work at home. Even shopkeepers combined their homes and places of business. Many artisans and merchants, of course, were employed away from home. In those ancient days there were no schools. Children learned the few things

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they had to know from parents, grandparents, and older brothers and sisters.

Most of the important celebrations and ceremonies took place in the home, as there were no synagogues or community houses. Only a few could make pilgrimages to Jerusalem for the chief festivals — Pesach, Shavuot and Succot. The great majority celebrated these and other holidays in their own homes.

Father was head of the family. But the mother was also held in respect. The Fifth Commandment states: "Honor thy father and thy mother." Brotherly love was held up as an ideal. The great friendship between David and Jonathan, remember, was compared to that of brothers. This, no doubt, was also true among sisters, as well as between sisters and brothers.

Jewish and Other Homes

After the Jews ceased to exist as a nation in Palestine and had been dispersed all over the world, the home became more important than formerly for perpetuating the religion and ideals of the Jewish people. Whether in Arabia, Spain, Germany, Turkey or in any other land, the Jewish home was distinct from the homes of non-Jewish neighbors. It had its Jewish books and ceremonial objects. The celebration of holidays and observance of customs continued. Respect for parents and other family ideals were held precious no matter how the non-Jews behaved among themselves. The home was a little sanctuary where Jewish life went on irrespective of the alien conditions surrounding it.

How could it have been otherwise? The people among whom the Jews lived were just becoming civilized. Both Christians and Moslems had adopted the principles of the

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Jewish faith and were beginning to discover what these principles meant. The Jews possessed the Bible and the Talmud which taught them how to live. We can readily understand why they considered themselves better than the barbaric German tribes, for example, and why they clung to their own ideas and customs. The home of the average Polish peasant five hundred years ago, as another example, was a noisy hovel in comparison with the clean, quiet Jewish house.

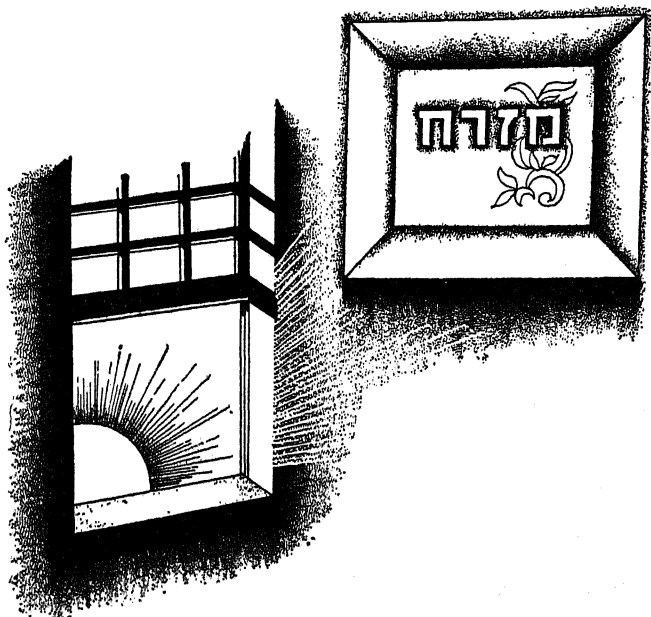
Today there are many kinds of Jewish homes, for our people live in all parts of the world, and in each country their homes resemble those of the inhabitants among whom they live. Even in a specific country we find differences in the kind of Jewish life practiced. But with all the differences, there are many similarities. Books like the Bible and the Siddur or prayerbook are found in American as well as in Yemenite homes. All Jewish families celebrate the same holidays, use the same ceremonial objects, cherish certain religious and human ideals in common, and are concerned with the fate of fellow Jews in other parts of the world.

WHAT JEWISH HOMES CONTAIN

As you enter a typical Jewish home, the first object to greet you is the Mezuzah fastened to the door-post. Inside its case of metal or wood is a parchment scroll containing the chapters of the SHEMA YISRAEL prayer, written in the same Hebrew script as the Sepher Torah. Through the little opening the word SHADAI or Almighty is visible. Pious Jews never enter or leave the house without reverently placing their fingers on this sacred word and then touching their

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lips. The Mezuzah has become the symbol of the Jewish home and the ideals for which it stands.



Pictures and Objects

Once inside the house, your eyes meet many Jewish objects. On the walls hang Jewish pictures, indispensable for making the home Jewish and beautiful. At one time the Mizrach, a picture with verses and illustrations in praise of God, hung on the east wall of every Jewish living-room. Today we find portraits of famous Jews, paintings of Palestine scenes, and similar pictures as well as sculptures of Jewish interest.

As you look about the room you notice that the ceremonial objects also serve to adorn the home and give it

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character. The Sabbath Menorah, the Hanukah lamp, the Havdalah spice-box, the Seder plate, the Etrog box, a miniature Sepher Torah, a Purim Megillah with its decorative case, these and similar articles are placed tastefully in various parts of the living and dining rooms. In some German-Jewish homes a Sabbath lamp hangs from the ceiling. A few homes possess a small Sepher Torah in an equally small and beautiful ark. As the Sabbath rolls around every week, and as each festival comes in its season, the appropriate articles are used for the various ceremonies.

There are additional Jewish objects in the home which are not displayed. Somewhere in a drawer are the Tallit and Tefillin, both in velvet bags beautifully embroidered. In the same drawer may be seen the white Kittel, worn on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur in the synagogue, and also at the Seder. In another drawer lie neatly folded two embroidered napkins. One is a Hallah cover for Shabbat, the other the Matzot cover for Pesach. On a shelf in the china closet, a silver or golden Kiddush goblet for the Sabbath and festivals occupies a prominent place, and next to it Elijah's wine cup. On the highest shelf, all covered up, rest the Pesach dishes and pots.

Jewish Library

The host will not consider it a breach of good manners if you look into the bookcase. Alongside the general books, you will find a small library of Jewish books, both ancient and modern: The Bible, prayerbooks, Haggadahs, The Talmud, the Shulchan Aruch; history books, Jewish biographies and poetry and fiction all of Jewish origin; books about Jewish life in America and other countries; about Palestine and Zionism; about religion; collections of Jewish plays,

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songs, and art works; Jewish books for children and youth on many subjects. Most of them are in English, but quite a number are in Hebrew or in Yiddish. The magazine-rack contains Jewish periodicals and pamphlets. On the piano are Jewish song-books. The victrola album contains Jewish records. We can be quite sure that the people living in this home are benefiting from the great literature of the Jewish people and are leading a Jewish cultural life.

A child raised amidst these surroundings learns to love everything Jewish. He also learns about his people, their religion, history, culture, and problems. Every picture and object teaches him something. He finds out what the ceremonial objects mean and how they are used. The books are always there for him, and when he observes that father and mother read them, he too acquires the habit of reading Jewish literature. Many parents make sure that the home library contains appropriate Jewish books and magazines for the younger and older children. As the child reads, father or mother are there to answer questions and to explain. Sometimes one of the parents tells a story or reads a poem to the children. Occasionally the family turns into a literary circle, reading aloud some book of fiction or poetry. The Bible is a favorite for such literary hours, especially on the Sabbath and holidays.

Dietary Laws

We can recognize a Jewish home also by the kinds of foods eaten there and by the way certain foods are prepared. We usually speak of these food customs as the Dietary Laws or Kashrut. Kosher foods are foods which Jewish law and custom permit, while *TREFAH* means the opposite. Jews have observed the dietary laws for so many centuries that they

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have become part of the Jewish religion. (See Chapter Three for a full description of the Dietary Laws and customs.)

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

When we remember the teachings and experiences of the Jewish people, we can understand why home and family have always been so precious to the Jews. In the Bible, we have many examples of beautiful home life: the obedience of Isaac, Jacob's love for Rachel, Joseph forgiving his brothers, the scene of Jacob's death and his blessings, David's mourning after Absalom, Ruth's devotion to her mother-in-law. Striking or cursing one's father or mother was considered a criminal act. Indeed, honoring parents has been one of the ten basic laws of the Jewish people and has remained so to this day. The Sixth Commandment reads:

Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

"God's presence dwells in a peaceful and loving home," says the Talmud, and it is the wife and mother who is the most important person in the home. "A good husband," this great book teaches, "loves his wife as himself but honors her more than himself." The ideal mother is loving, modest and gentle. "When his wife dies, a man's world is darkened," is a saying Jews often quote.

On Friday nights, the father pays homage to his wife by reciting the famous chapter from the Bible "A Woman of Worth,"* describing the ideal wife and mother.

* Proverbs xxxi, 10-31.

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The father's place in the home is fittingly shown by the beautiful custom of blessing the children, a custom which dates back to Isaac and Jacob. To this day, in many homes, the father blesses his children on Friday nights, on Rosh Hashanah eve and on Yom Kippur before leaving for the synagogue. This blessing freely translated reads as follows:

May God make you as Ephraim and Manasseh. May it be the will of our Father in Heaven to implant within your heart love and fear of Him. May you desire to study the Torah and obey its commandments. May your eyes look straight ahead, your mouth speak the truth, your hands perform good deeds, and your legs be quick to do the will of God. May He grant you upright sons and daughters who will live in accordance with the Torah. May your source of livelihood be secure, so that you will earn a living without depending on the favors of man and have time to worship the Lord. May you be inscribed for a long and happy life.

In very ancient times, the father or patriarch was the ruler of home and family. He made laws and enforced them. Later, however, laws were instituted by teachers, parents, judges and kings. The father, as the master of the house, was looked up to for support and depended on for guidance.

Of the many duties which a father has towards his family, education and vocational training are especially emphasized in the Talmud. "One who does not teach his son a trade is bringing him up to be a thief," we read in one place, for in those days a person who was not trained to be a farmer, an artisan or a merchant was often tempted to steal. The father's duty to give his child an education is indicated by the saying that one should not live in a community which has no school.

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Children's Privileges and Duties

Children have always been considered a blessing, childlessness a misfortune. In fact, to have children is a biblical commandment. If after ten years of married life, there is no issue of the union, the husband and wife are free to divorce one another and to remarry, according to Jewish law.

So many of the customs and ceremonies are intended primarily for one's offspring that we can say definitely that the child has been the center of the Jewish home. The Seder ceremony is built around the child in order to impress him with great historic events and with the ideal of liberty. Most of the Hanukah, Purim and Lag Beomer festivities and games are principally for children. Then there are the Brit Milah, the Pidyon Haben and the Bar Mitzvah — all special child celebrations.

The Shulchan Aruch contains many rules concerning honor due to parents. A child must not cause them any pain or shame. He must not sit in father's usual place. Parents should not be awakened from sleep unless it is to perform some Mitzvah or good deed. In their old age, they should be looked after by their children and provided with all their needs.

Throughout the ages we find devotion and affection not only between parents and children but also between members of the larger family. Grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins and even more distant relatives have always felt closely bound to one another. Today many large families have family clubs and give annual parties so as to keep alive their affection. The Yahrzeit custom shows how anxious Jews have been to remember their parents and honor them even after death. Naming children after grandparents and uncles

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and aunts is another way of paying respect to departed relatives.

Shalom Bayit

To what extent do these family ideals hold true today? Are parents and children devoted to each other? Do Jewish parents give their children a good education, and prepare them for making a living? Are the ceremonies and customs, intended especially for children, observed? Do uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents and even more distant relatives feel a close kinship to one another? Do they gather together on happy occasions? Do they help one another in times of misfortune? Is there Shalom Bayit — peace and love — in the home? The answers to these questions for any one family are determined to a large extent by the Jewish education which the parents and children possess — on how well they know and appreciate the teachings of Judaism regarding family life.

HOME IDEALS AND VIRTUES

Because Jews are a home-loving people, they find the greatest joy in the bosom of family and friends. During the dark centuries when Jews were humiliated and made to wear a yellow badge, they sought peace, rest and cheer in the home. On Shabbat, father felt himself a king, mother a queen, and the children princes in their own palace. The festivals, with their songs, games and ceremonies, coming rather often, brought pleasure and joy to the family. Frequently, there were such festive occasions as a Brit, a Bar Mitzvah, a wedding, a Siyum of a sacred book, a Hanukat Habayit, or a special banquet in honor of a learned visitor.

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These events made every Jew happy that he was a Jew and could enjoy these MITZVOT of Israel.

Hospitality

The ancient Jewish trait of hospitality added to the cheerfulness of home life. You remember the stories of Abraham's hospitality to Lot and to the three angels. This trait, which is also a part of other Oriental peoples, Jews have always held dear. In Talmudic times, doors were kept open for wayfarers. During the Middle Ages, when men feared to travel because of hostility to strangers, Jewish travelers, whether rich or poor, were always sure of a hearty welcome by their brethren. In fact, families vied with one another for the honor of having a guest at their tables, especially on the Sabbath and holidays. To this day, the Seder begins with an invitation to those who are hungry and who cannot hold a Seder of their own.

Moderation, Purity and Modesty

On all festive occasions in the home, Jews have drunk wine and also stronger drinks, always saying LEHAYIM, "to life." Nevertheless, drunkenness has been rare among Jews, for they drank with moderation. We rarely hear of Jewish home parties ending up with brawls or fights. In fact, moderation or not overdoing things, has been one of the chief Jewish virtues. This applied to food as well as to drink, for the dietary laws taught the Jew self-control.

With moderation went piety and reverence. The daily prayers, the blessings, and the religious ceremonies taught the Jewish child to be pious and God-fearing. IM YIRTZEH HASHEM, "God be willing" has been a common expression on the lips of everyone. Home life also taught the child rev-

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erence or respectfulness — reverence for older persons, for sacred books, and objects, for God and religion, for learned men, for the beauties of nature, and for great ideals.

Parents also taught their children modesty and piety. Modesty, they were told, means not to be boastful or haughty. Mother taught the older daughters about courtship and marriage and what modesty means in their behavior toward boys. Purity was explained as being sincere and honest, absence of evil thoughts, and not taking God's name in vain. It also meant keeping the Jewish family pure by not marrying out of the Jewish fold.

Kindliness

Kindliness in the Jewish home does not stop with affection among members of the family. It extends also to domestic animals. Sabbath rest is ordered for animals as well as for human beings. A person may not sit down to eat before he has fed his animals. TZAAR BAAL HAYIM, pity for living creatures, is the Hebrew exclamation when an animal is mistreated. This kindliness may explain why domestic pets were unknown in Jewish homes until recent times, for it was considered a form of cruelty to deprive animals of their natural way of living.

Cleanliness

Jewish home life has also been distinguished by its habits of cleanliness. In medieval times the houses of Jews were better kept in comparison with non-Jewish homes. Every Friday and preceding every holiday the rooms received a thorough cleaning. Fruits and vegetables were always examined for decay. Washing the hands before eating was made a religious ceremony. Finger-bowls have been used

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widely by Jews at home and at banquets. The table was spoken of as "an altar of God" and was so treated. We can best see the sanitary habits of the Jew in the Dietary Laws, which are also laws of health and cleanliness.

The Ideal of Tzedakah

The Jewish child also learned in the home the ideal of Tzedakah. In ancient times he saw his father set apart the corner of the field for the poor, and leave behind the forgotten bundles, and the ears of grain which fell to the ground. The child knew, too, that father gave MAASER or tithe for the upkeep of the Temple and for other community needs. In these days, the Jewish child sees Tzedakah practiced all year round. Every Friday coins are dropped into the charity-box, or the Keren Kayemet box, found in many homes. Before Pesach a special contribution known as Maot Hittim, or Coins for Wheat, goes for providing the poor with Matzot and other Pesach necessities. Erev Yom Kippur, it is Kapparot money; on Hanukah, it is Hanukah money; on Purim, it is Shalahmanot, in addition to the annual subscriptions and special donations given to the local Federation, to Zionist funds, to the Joint Distribution Committee, and to other worthy causes.

As far back as three thousand years ago, the Jews had a law that a house with a flat roof must have a balustrade or fence all around so that no one might fall off. This taught the child how precious human life was and that one must practice habits of safety. He acquired self-control by not eating the fruit of young trees and by observing similar customs. The Sabbath taught him zest for work and the joy of rest. Each of the festivals stands for some great ideal — Pesach for liberty; Shavuot for learning; Yom Kippur for

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forgiveness. These and many other traits and ideals the Jewish child learned at home.

HOME AND COMMUNITY

The home is part of the Jewish community. Indeed, the Jewish community consists of many families working together for their mutual benefit and for the welfare of others. How well they cooperate determines the character of the community. Good, cooperative Jewish homes mean a united Jewish community.

Just how does the home take part in community life? Supposing you were to make a study of twenty-five Jewish homes in the neighborhood. You would find that they are not all alike in this respect. Some take part in certain activities and the remainder in others. Neither are all equally active in communal affairs.

Many families belong to synagogues. The dues they pay to maintain the institutions entitles a family to the use of its facilities and to the services of the rabbi. On Sabbath and holidays, parents and children may come for religious worship; orthodox Jews attend services daily. If the synagogue maintains a school, the children are entitled to its advantages. Father, mother and the older children may join one or more of the synagogue clubs. In these and other ways the synagogue satisfies important needs of the home.

The young people from many of these homes most likely belong to the Jewish Center or the Young Men's Hebrew Association in the neighborhood, where meetings, sports, lectures, dances and other activities are conducted. The younger boys and girls probably attend the Hebrew School in the community. In fact, families frequently arrange to

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live near these institutions. Without synagogues, schools and Centers the home could not carry on Jewish traditions and ideals. Mothers may also feel that they prefer to live where they can more easily procure kosher meat and other Jewish foods.

A study of these homes should also include a question about organizations to which members of the families belong. The answers would show that they belong to Zionist clubs, B'nai B'rith lodges, charitable societies and similar associations. These, too, are part of Jewish group life, and by joining them the individuals become active members of the Jewish community.

Another question concerns contributions to Jewish needs. One would learn that Jewish families support many causes. They give to the Federation for local needs, to the United Palestine Appeal for the Rebuilding of Palestine, to the Joint Distribution Committee for relief of Jews overseas, and to numerous other worthy purposes. Raising these funds is an important responsibility of the Jewish community in which every family must share.

Hanukat Habayit

Jewish life in the home, in the days of our forefathers, usually began with a Hanukat Habayit or a housewarming party, which like so many other family gatherings had the character of a religious ceremony. In addition to relatives and friends, a learned Jew was invited to grace the occasion. This beautiful custom of Hanukat Habayit is still practiced, especially by newly married couples and by those who move into a house of their own.

The ceremony begins with the fastening of the Mezuzah on the door-post, accompanied by the benediction: "Blessed

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be Thou, our God, King of the universe, Who hast made us holy with His Mitzvot and commanded us to fasten the Mezuzah." Then follows the chanting of psalms and prayers. One of the prayers reads in part:

"Master of the universe, look down from your holy habitation and accept in mercy and favor the prayer of Thy children who are gathered here to dedicate this dwelling and to offer their thanksgiving. . . Grant them that they may live in their homes in brotherhood and friendship."

Part of the ceremony consists of bringing bread and salt into the house as a symbol of prosperity. Refreshments, singing and good fellowship follow the ceremony. The learned guest usually delivers a lecture on the significance of the occasion.

With this ceremony, Jewish life in the home begins. What this home life consists of we have seen in the preceding pages. Upon entering the house our eyes meet the Mezuzah, Jewish pictures, ceremonial objects, Jewish books and magazines. In the kitchen and at meals the Dietary Laws are observed. The Sabbath, the holidays and the personal ceremonies are celebrated with devotion. The children are taught the ideals of Tzedakah, hospitality, kindness, moderation and other virtues equally important. They are sent to a Jewish school to obtain a good education. In family relations, Shalom Bayit, a peaceful, loving home is the goal, and the commandment "Honor thy father and thy mother" is the guide. The home is part of the Jewish community, participating in communal affairs and contributing towards its maintenance. In such a home the child grows up an intelligent, self-respecting Jew, and a loyal citizen.



Chapter Three

THE DIETARY LAWS AND CUSTOMS

WHETHER at home or away from home, Jews have always been very careful about their food habits and manners. Already in ancient days they had special laws prescribing what animals may be eaten. As time went on and the Jews became more civilized, new laws were added to the old. The Bible, the Talmud, the writings of Maimonides, the Shulchan Aruch and other sacred books are replete with laws, customs and sayings about eating habits. In time, the Dietary Laws or Kashrut became part of the Jewish religion.

It was the search for the good life which explains this anxiety over food habits and manners. For Jews believed

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that the daily diet affects man's whole being — his health as well as his character. They were also convinced that the Dietary Laws were necessary for the existence of the Jewish people.

WHY DIETARY LAWS

The Bible states that Kashrut was given to the children of Israel to make them pure and holy. "Ye shall not make yourselves detestable with any swarming thing . . . neither shall ye make yourselves unclean with them . . . For I am the Lord your God; sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy; for I am holy." Although only swarming or creeping creatures are mentioned in this sentence, the idea behind it applies to all forbidden animals, fowl and fish which the Holy Scriptures specify.

Holiness

How carefulness about food leads to holiness is explained in the Talmud by Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair: "Heedfulness leads to cleanness; cleanness to purity; purity to holiness; holiness to humility; humility to dread of sin; dread of sin to saintliness; saintliness to the possession of the Holy Spirit."

The great Maimonides believed that the Dietary Laws train us to control our desires and appetites so that we may resist the tendency to indulge only in things that are pleasant. Observing these laws, therefore, is indispensable training in self-control, which has been a Jewish characteristic during our long history. Maimonides also wrote that Kashrut teaches us that eating and drinking are not the goal of man's existence. In other words, a person's character is determined in part by what and how he eats.

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Loyalty

It will never be known how many Jews suffered persecution and even death for the sake of the Dietary Laws. In the days of the Maccabees, many died rather than transgress these laws. At all times, Jews have practiced Kashrut for religious reasons and from a sense of loyalty. Faithfully observed, these customs help one to find himself a Jew from childhood on. At every meal he has to think of his allegiance to his faith. They serve not only as constant reminders of the fact that he is a Jew, but also as proof of his deliberate acknowledgment of that fact.

Failure to observe Kashrut has been considered an act of disloyalty, even of apostasy, for these laws and customs have proved an important factor in the preservation of the Jewish race, and they are indispensable for maintaining Jewish identity in the present. Many Jews who do not regard themselves as orthodox keep the Dietary Laws, believing that they are no less important than the holidays for preserving the Jewish people and their traditions and ideals.

Good Health

Some dietary laws and customs undoubtedly came into being for reasons of health. In fact, the word Kosher means fit to eat or clean. In the course of their long history, Jews found that the flesh of certain animals was not fit to eat and therefore forbade them. Modern science bears this out by recognizing that some animals harbor parasites which are disease-carriers. The Jews also learned from experience that there is a definite connection between good health and proper care of food. It is known that during the Middle Ages, Jews enjoyed better health and longer life than their

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neighbors. Even today, Jews are immune or less susceptible to certain diseases. There is good reason to believe that the superior health and longevity of the Jews have been partly due to the Dietary Laws.

PERMITTED AND FORBIDDEN FOODS

There are no restrictions on vegetables and fruits. One must be sure, however, that the fruit comes from a tree at least three years old. The Jewish farmers in ancient Palestine practiced this custom so that the young trees would be permitted to grow tall and strong. Neither are there any restrictions on dairy foods, provided that the milk is from kosher animals.

Kosher and Trefah Creatures

Among living creatures many species are forbidden. All winged insects and all creeping things, which multiply rapidly and are a pest to man, are prohibited.

Kosher fish must have scales and fins, although those having scales and only rudimentary fins are allowed. Oysters, lobsters, and other shell-fish are on the forbidden list because they are disease-carriers, especially in hot climates.

Among mammals, only those which have cloven hoofs and chew the cud are permitted. This excludes practically all wild animals, with the exception of the deer family which may be eaten if properly slaughtered. The hoof must be completely cloven. The camel, therefore, is Trefah, because it has a pad or cushion at the bottom of the hoof.

As to fowl, the Bible lists the forbidden varieties, including vultures, hawks, owls, ravens, pelicans, storks, bats, and

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many others. There are also general characteristics by which one can tell whether a bird is Kosher or not.

Practically all the forbidden animals and birds are creatures of prey, or loathsome in appearance and mode of living. How would you explain this? How would you also explain that beasts of burden, with the exception of the ox, are on the forbidden list?



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Meat and Milk

A distinguishing mark of Jewish homes and restaurants is the two sets of dishes, pots, and other kitchen utensils — one for meat and the other for dairy foods. Strict homes have also different stoves and sinks. The separation of meat and milk is an ancient custom observed very carefully all these centuries. In ancient times the flesh of the kid could not be boiled in its mother's milk, for the Bible states several times: "Thou shalt not seethe the kid in its mother's milk." Later on this law was applied to every kind of meat and to all dairy food. This also explains why observant Jews wait six hours after a meat meal before eating any dairy food.

SHEHITAH

The meat a Jewish mother buys in a market is from kosher animals, prepared in accordance with the laws of Shehitah or slaughtering. Any other meat is considered Trefah. One important provision in the laws of Shehitah is that only a certain individual, the Shohet, is allowed to slaughter animals for food. He must be a learned, pious man, specially trained and properly certified. The authority to grant a slaughtering certificate is vested in the Bet Din, or in a rabbi, who must give the candidate a thorough examination before issuing the certificate.

Reasons for Shehitah

Jews are justly proud of the Shohet institution. The commandment "Do not kill" has been interpreted to mean that even for purposes of food, animals may not be killed by everyone. A person who kills an animal, our ancestors must

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have reasoned, and rightly so, is likely to be careless with human life. But since man depends on meat as an important food, the act of slaughtering has been turned into a religious rite, to be performed by one specially trained for this purpose.

Equally important are the detailed instructions for the slaughtering of the animal by the Shohet: Maimonides said: "Since the need of procuring food necessitates the slaying of animals, the law enjoins that the death of the animal should be the easiest." Actually, the Jewish method of slaughtering causes instantaneous unconsciousness, and permits the greatest effusion of blood. The Haleff or knife used by the Shohet must be of a prescribed size for each kind of animal, and of the maximum keenness, to prevent the slightest unnecessary suffering.

There are several countries where Shehitah is forbidden by law. In enlightened lands like Switzerland and Norway, such laws were enacted because of the ignorance as to what the Jewish method of slaughtering actually is. In Nazi Germany, the purpose was to inflict another hardship on the Jews. Strictly religious Jews in these countries either do without meat or import meat products from other lands.

Supervision of Kashrut

After the animal is slaughtered, the Shohet examines the lungs for any internal disease. If he finds an unnatural growth or abscess, the animal is declared to be Trefah. The butcher also is keenly observant while disemboweling and preparing the carcass. Should he find anything suspicious, he calls in the Shohet or a rabbi to decide whether the meat is Kosher or Trefah. In the case of fowl, the housewife is

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expected to examine the internal organs carefully, and to consult a rabbi if she finds anything abnormal.

Meat-packing houses in cities where Jews live in appreciable numbers have Kosher departments, supervised by a MASHGIACH or special inspector. Each carcass properly slaughtered is stamped with the official seal. Paying the Shohet and the MASHGIACH increases the cost of slaughtering, which explains in part why Kosher meats are more expensive than Trefah. In the larger Jewish communities there also exists a VAAD HAKASHRUT, or Kashrut Council. This council supervises the slaughtering in the stockyards, the preparation of smoked meat, and the retail Jewish meat markets. Certificates of Kashrut are issued annually to reliable plants and stores. The State of New York, as well as other states, has special laws which prohibit misrepresentation and sale of Trefah meat as Kosher.

PREPARING THE MEAT

When the meat is delivered to the retail store, it is not yet ritually fit to be sold. What remains to be done is the Nikkur, or removal of certain ligaments. This the butcher does when preparing the cuts we see on display in meat markets.

Jewish stores in America sell only the fore-quarters of the carcass. This is because few butchers know how to remove the ligaments from the hindquarters and, chiefly, because this portion of the carcass commands higher prices in non-Jewish stores. In Palestine, and also in other countries, Jews enjoy also the hind-quarters with its choice cuts.

After the ligaments are removed, one more step remains before the meat is ready for the pot—draining it thoroughly

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of blood. Blood is expressly forbidden in the Bible, for "Blood is life." The Jewish method of slaughtering, therefore, provides for as complete a draining as possible. But this is not sufficient. At home the meat is soaked in water for half an hour, kept in salt for a full hour, and then thoroughly rinsed. Some meat may be broiled, however, without this special treatment. Eggs which have blood spots are forbidden by Jewish law.

THE TABLE AN ALTAR

In the sacred books of the Jewish people, the table is spoken of as an altar and the act of eating as a sacred rite. Every meal, therefore, should be hallowed by prayer. On week-days the meal begins with the Hamotzi blessing, while on the Sabbath and holidays it commences with the beautiful Kiddush. The dinner is concluded with Grace, for the Bible states: "And thou shalt eat and be satisfied and bless the Lord thy God for the good which He hath given thee." But Grace contains not only prayers of thanksgiving for the food, but also for Eretz Yisrael and for the Temple, as well as selections of general praise and petition.

The pious Jew never places food into his mouth without reciting the appropriate benediction, and there are special blessings for bread, for fruit, for vegetables, for cakes and cookies, for wine, and even for water.

Our ancestors added a touch of ecstasy to Grace by singing gleeful table chants or Zemiroth. This enjoyable custom was soon adopted for the Sabbath meals and spread to every part of the world where Jews live. At holiday meals, too, special songs are sung. Whether it be Pesach, Shavuot, or

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Succot, there are appropriate, tuneful melodies to sing and chant between courses.

Before sitting down at the table-altar, the Jew was enjoined to wash his hands and recite the prescribed Berachah. One rabbi, two thousand years ago, said: "He who eats without cleaning his hands is like one who partakes of impure food." The ritual at the table also provides for washing the fingers after the meal, at least for the men, when there are three present to recite Grace as a Mezuman.

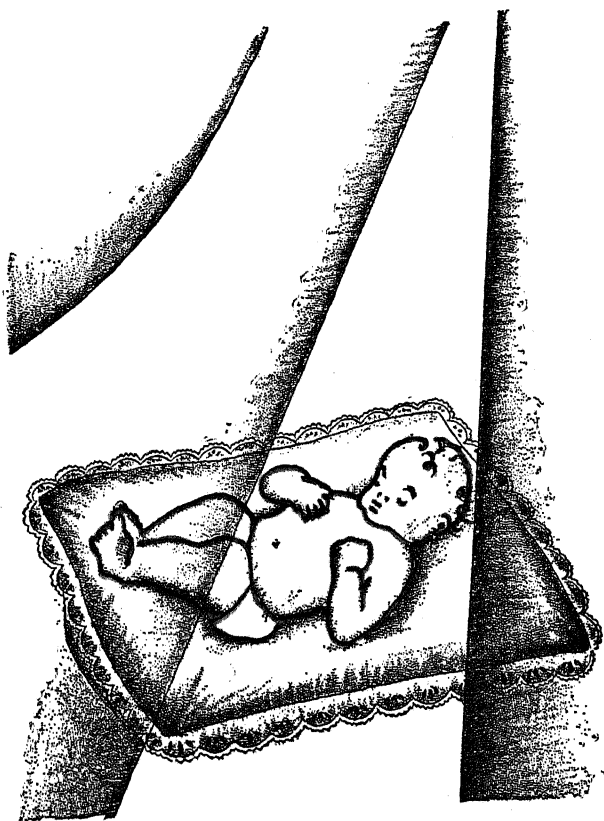
To eat well and to enjoy the food has been considered both necessary and desirable. But one should eat moderately, for the purpose of eating is to maintain good health. Gluttony was strongly condemned. One should also eat slowly. In words of a famous teacher: "He who lingers at the table prolongs his life." This may explain why conversation at the table is encouraged among Jews.

Like every people, Jews have their favorite dishes, especially on the Sabbath and holidays. Gefilte fish, Cholent, Tzimes, Kreplach, and the like are popular. What would Pesach be without Knaidlach; Shavuot without Blintzes; Hanukah without Latkes; Purim without Hamantaschen; and Shabbat without Gefilte fish? Even though not part of the Dietary Laws, these so-called Jewish dishes help to make Jewish home life distinctive.

We can hardly exaggerate the importance of Kashrut in the life of our people throughout the ages. Indeed, the Dietary Laws were considered part and parcel of their religion. Our ancestors believed these customs to be a way of influencing for better the life of every man, woman and child. To break them meant to be eating things unclean, impure, harmful. They were also convinced that without the Dietary Laws, the Jews as a people could not long endure.

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Furthermore, by introducing prayers and songs, they made each meal a more inspiring and enjoyable function. In our generation, the Dietary Laws and table customs continue to occupy an important place. While neglected in some homes, most Jews still cling to these laws tenaciously, and consider the reasons for the observance of Kashrut to be as sound as in past centuries.



Chapter Four

BRIT MILAH OR CIRCUMCISION

THE Sabbath is an occasion of importance to the whole family, and so are the holidays and festivals, each in its season. Certain Jewish customs, however, are of special significance to some one person, and are held in his or her

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honor. One of these, Brit Milah or Circumcision, is observed eight days after birth. At the end of the month, the Pidyon Haben is celebrated. Years later the child becomes Ben Torah or school pupil, and again the family celebrates. Seven years later, the boy is Bar Mitzvah; once again there is festivity. Following maturity wedding-bells ring. All these and other personal ceremonies are observed in honor of outstanding events in the life of an individual.

Brit Milah is considered one of the most significant personal customs. Though practiced for some four thousand years, it is still held in high esteem by all Jews. To all of them, whether conservative, reform, or orthodox, whether religious or radical, the Brit is a symbol of their Jewish allegiance, and is so observed.

ORIGIN AND SIGNIFICANCE

Circumcision dates back to the days of Abraham. In the book of Genesis we read: "This is My Covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and thy seed after thee: every male among you shall be circumcised. . . . And Abraham was ninety years old and nine, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin."

It may be that in ancient times circumcision was a ceremony of initiation into manhood and was performed at the age of puberty. The Moslems observe the custom to this very day at the age of thirteen. Some American Indians who practiced this rite likewise observed it at the age of puberty. This is true also among Australian tribes at present.

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In time, circumcision among Jews became a ceremony of initiation into the House of Israel rather than a symbol of manhood, and was performed on the eighth day following birth. Just when the change took place is not known. Evidently the custom suffered neglect for many years, for we find that the son of Moses was not yet circumcised when Moses returned to Egypt. We also read that the Hebrews of the Exodus generation were not circumcised. Some believe that the change took place for humanitarian reasons, since an infant is less sensitive to pain and the wound heals more readily. The Torah prescribes definitely the eighth day: "And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised."

One of First Mitzvot

Whatever the origin may have been, the rite of circumcision has been and is now one of the most basic Jewish customs. It is considered one of the first Mitzvot or commandments given to the Jews. Our forefathers always practiced it with the devotion given only to the things people consider most precious. In Maccabean days, many mothers who had their male infants circumcised, even though Antiochus forbade it, were put to death by the king's officers who "hanged their babes around their necks." In modern times, when many Jews have abandoned some of the old traditions, Brit Milah is holding its own. Reform Jews, as well as extreme radicals, adhere to this ancient rite.

Symbol of Allegiance

The very name describes the importance of the rite to our people. Brit means covenant or agreement, signifying that the Jews have accepted certain beliefs, laws and ideals, vow-

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ing to live in accordance with them. Circumcision is a visible symbol of this compact, to which every male Jew pledges himself upon birth. It is a sign of the Covenant — a mark of loyalty to the people and their ideals. The famous Jewish philosopher Spinoza said: "Such great importance do I attach to the sign of the Covenant that I am persuaded that it is sufficient in itself to maintain the separate existence of the nation forever."

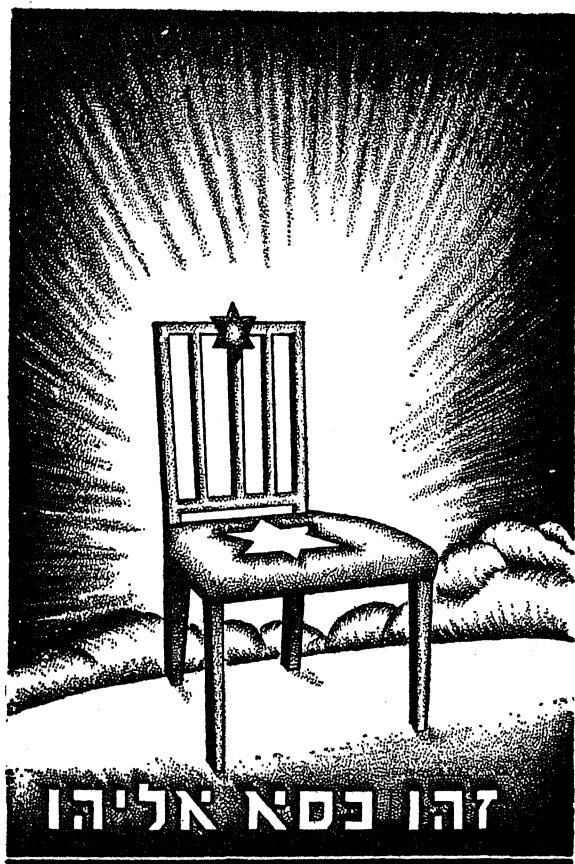
Today we know of another sound reason for this custom. Circumcision has been found to be an important health measure, advocated by medical men and scientists. This is perhaps best seen in India, where the Hindus do not practice the rite while the Moslems do. As a result, the Moslems are known to suffer less from cancer of the genital organs than the Hindus. Removing the foreskin prevents the danger of infection. Many non-Jews in America and other civilized countries have this operation performed for hygienic reasons. Maimonides, who was also a physician, believed that circumcision prevents excessive lust.

A FESTIVE CEREMONY

Because Jews have considered circumcision so essential, they have observed it as a festive ceremony; and by doing so the custom has been passed along from generation to generation. In past ages the ceremony was held in the synagogue, but in recent centuries it has been celebrated at home. At present, it is often performed in the hospital.

A Brit is an occasion to which relatives, friends and neighbors are invited. The chief actors in the ceremony, however, are the Mohel, the Sandek, and the Quatter, together with the invisible guest Elijah. The Mohel who per-

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forms the circumcision has to be not only an expert surgeon but also a learned and forthright man. The Sandek or godfather holds the infant during the operation, while the Quater brings the child to the Sandek. For Elijah, a special chair is reserved, upon which the infant is placed just before the operation. This, the Jews believed, insured the child's health

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and promoted quick healing. It is also customary to light candles at the Brit.

"Welcome, Baruch Haba," the infant is greeted as he is brought in by the Quatter and placed on Elijah's chair, for a moment, before he is handed to the Mohel. Everyone but the Sandek rises and remains standing during the ceremony. After the Mohel performs the operation, the father recites a benediction of thanks for the privilege or Mitzvah of initiating his child into the Covenant of Abraham. The guests convey their good wishes by saying: "As he has entered the covenant, so may he live to study the Torah, to be wedded, and to perform good deeds."

"You're a little Jew now," the mother exclaims tearfully as the whimpering infant is returned to her. The Seudah which follows is a real feast, accompanied by much singing and merriment. One of the plates on the table is empty at first, but is soon filled with coins which the guests contribute to charity, for as on all joyous occasions the less fortunate are remembered. In many homes, money is given to the Keren Kayemet for the purchase of land in Palestine.

Naming the Boy

Part of the ceremony is naming the boy, which is done immediately after the circumcision. The child is usually named after some near relative who has passed away. This is an old custom and is intended to keep alive family memories. A boy who bears the name of a grandfather, for example, is a constant reminder of him throughout life. Sometimes Hebrew names of famous Jews are chosen. By doing so, Jews show their pride in their ancestry and keep

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alive memories of our great forefathers. Children who change their beautiful Hebrew names beyond recognition do so because of ignorance or because of lack of pride in their Jewish people and history. In recent years, Zionists have been giving their children modern Palestinian names.*

Naming a Girl

Girls are officially named in the synagogue, preferably on the Sabbath following birth. The father is called up to the Torah and a special prayer is recited in her honor, which reads in part: "He who blessed Sarah, Rebbekah, Leah and Rachel, Miriam the prophetess and Esther the queen, may He bless this dear girl. Let her be called (pronounces the girl's and father's names) in a lucky hour. May she grow up in health and peace, and may her parents live to celebrate her wedding." After the Services, everyone in the synagogue is invited to the vestry-rooms for refreshments. At home, too, the happy event is often celebrated with a party for relatives and friends.

* Surnames or family names have become popular among Jews only during the past century and a half. In ancient times, persons were identified by giving the name of the father, like Joshua bin Nun, Yohanan ben Zaccai, and Solomon ibn Gabirol. In the year 1787, the Austrian Government ordered all Jews to adopt surnames, limiting the choice of names largely to the Bible. The officers appointed to carry out this order, however, were given wide powers, which they frequently abused, by arbitrarily giving names as they pleased. This accounts for such Jewish family names as Weinglass, Fresser, Pferd, and Eselkopf. Many Jewish surnames are of Biblical origin, like Aaronson, Abrahams, Davidson, Jonas, Cohen and Levy. Others are named after places where the ancestors of the particular families once resided, like Berlin, Oppenheim, London, Goldberg, Rubenstein, and Rosenberg, all these being names of towns. Still another category is descriptive of occupations, as Kaufman, Schneider, Schechter, and Rabinowitz. In modern Palestine, Jews are hebraizing their names: Goldberg to Har Zahav, Rosenberg to Vardi, Tannenbaum to Arzi, and Stein to Avni.

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PIDYON HABEN

If the boy is the family's first-born, another ceremony is held at the end of the month. It is called Pidyon Haben or Pidyon Habechor, which means redemption of the first-born male. It is natural that the first child should be received with special joy by the new parents. And because in olden times boys were considered more important than girls, the first-born male child was the object of celebration.

The oldest son has always taken first rank in the family. In case of the father's death, he usually became the head, to whom the younger brothers and sisters looked for advice and help. He inherited a larger share of the family's possessions than any of the other children. In royal houses, it is the oldest son who usually ascended the throne upon the king's death, as at present. Parents, therefore, have always hoped that their first child would be a boy. This is true to a certain extent today.

Reason for the Custom

There was a time when ancient peoples offered the first-born male children as sacrifices to their gods. We do not know whether the earliest Hebrews ever practiced this custom. What we do know is that the first-born males were dedicated to the service of God, to act as priests, musicians and servants in the Temple.* "For all first-born are mine," the Bible states. This practice evidently proved a hardship on families. Moreover, parents did not like to part with their oldest children. Therefore, the tribe of Levi, was set aside to act as priests and servants in the Temple, in place

* The first-born males among the Kosher animals, however, were offered as sacrifices.

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of the first-born. In the book of Numbers we read: "And I, behold, have taken the Levites instead of every first-born; and the Levites shall be mine." Accordingly, every first-born child was redeemed, that is, freed from service by paying the amount of five shekalim (about \$2.50) to the Kohen or Levite who served for him.

The Bible explains why the first-born is to be dedicated to the service of God in the following words: "On the day that I smote all the first-born in the land of Egypt I allowed unto me all the first-born in Israel, both man and beast. Mine shall they be."

Observance Today

Although the Temple was destroyed nearly two thousand years ago, this ancient ceremony is widely observed today. On the thirtieth day after the child's birth, a home gathering is arranged to which relatives and friends are invited. Among the guests is a Kohen, who is thought to be a descendant of Aaron. The ceremony consists of giving the Kohen the sum of five shekalim or \$2.50, and reciting appropriate prayers. The boy is then pronounced redeemed or freed from the service commanded for all first-born males. Unless the Kohen is very poor, he returns the money to the parents who give it to a worthy Jewish cause. The ceremony is followed by a party as an expression of thanksgiving for the privilege or Mitzvah of redemption.

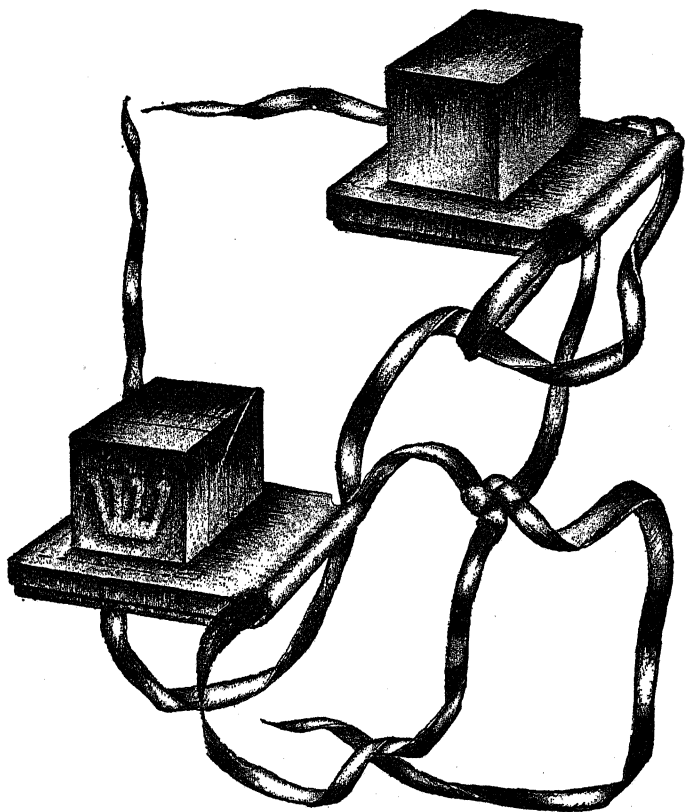
Siyum Hatorah

The special ceremonial obligations of the first-born son do not end with Pidyon Haben. Every year he is expected to fast on Erev Pesach, for on that day according to the Bible, the first-born males among the Egyptians were smit-

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ten, while among the Hebrews they were not harmed. Instead of fasting, he may perform his duty by attending a Siyum Hatorah in the synagogue. Siyum means completion; it is the ceremony held when the study of a sacred book is completed by a class. Such study classes or groups, which meet in every orthodox synagogue, arrange to finish a tractate of the Talmud on the day before Pesach in order to relieve the first-born of the duty of fasting.

When only thirty days old, Jewish boys have the privilege of either one or two impressive ceremonies. At the time they mean nothing to the infants, except for the pain of circumcision. As soon as the boys are old enough, their parents describe these important events to them. The children feel justly glad and proud to have been the objects of such celebrations and that they have been properly initiated into the Jewish fold. To the family, of course, the Brit and the Pidyon Haben are happy occasions. The parents are happy because a fine male child has been added to the family, and that as Jews they have done their duty.



Chapter Five

BAR MITZVAH

CIRCUMCISION marks the infant's initiation into the Jewish fold. Bar Mitzvah, thirteen years later, symbolizes the beginning of maturity for the boy. Between these two occasions, the most important single event in the life of a child is

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his entry into school. This occasion, too, Jews have celebrated with a special ceremony known as Ben Torah or Son of Torah. Today, it is assuming a new meaning in many American Jewish schools. Because of its importance in years past and its new development, the Ben Torah custom deserves a brief description at this point.

BEN TORAH

Nowhere in the Bible, in the Talmud or in the Shulchan Aruch, do we find any commandments or laws about the ceremony of inducting the child into school. Nevertheless, so anxious have Jews been for their sons to be diligent pupils that they took the trouble to make the boy's first school day an occasion he would remember all his life. This custom also shows how deeply attached Jews have been to the Torah and how great has been their love of learning.

The ceremony usually took place on Shavuot, which is the traditional Torah festival, commemorating the giving of the Ten Commandments. The young boy, wrapped in a Tallit, was carried to the synagogue by the Rabbi, escorted by the family and relatives. There he was blessed before an open scroll and the Ten Commandments were read to him. Then he was taken into the Heder or school for his first lesson, a very unusual lesson, indeed. It consisted of the sentence from the Torah: "Moses commanded as a law, an inheritance for the assembly of Jacob," written or rather smeared with honey on a slate. As the boy repeated each word, gifts of fruit and sweets dropped down on the table from "heaven." These he stuffed into his pockets while lisping the sentence. It is not difficult to imagine the child's excitement and joy on this first school day.

BAR MITZVAH

Today this custom is being introduced anew into Jewish schools, but in a different form, of course, and is becoming known as the Consecration Ceremony. A day or two after the child is enrolled in the school, the class arranges a little party in his honor. In other schools, new classes are officially welcomed by the rest of the pupils with a festive assembly. Sometimes the next highest class entertains the new group. The purpose of these parties and assemblies is the same as of the old Ben Torah ceremony — namely, to introduce the child to his Jewish studies in an enjoyable and impressive manner.

BAR MITZVAH

When the boy reaches Bar Mitzvah he is not only old enough to enjoy the ceremony but also to appreciate its importance to himself, to his family and friends, and to his people. Like the custom of Ben Torah, Bar Mitzvah is of recent origin when compared to other Jewish ceremonies. But unlike the Ben Torah it has grown in importance during the past generation. Never has it been observed so elaborately as at present, particularly in America. In fact, Bar Mitzvah has given rise to another ceremony, confirmation, and it is being extended also to girls.

The custom of Bar Mitzvah is not mentioned in the Bible or Talmud and we first hear of it some six hundred years ago. According to the Bible a person reaches the age of responsibility on his twentieth birthday. In the Talmud, we do read that at the age of thirteen, boys begin to develop into men, but nothing is said about a special ceremony. It is in the Shulchan Aruch, which was written in the sixteenth century, that we find directions for celebrating Bar Mitzvah.

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It has been believed that up to the thirteenth year the father bears the sins of his son. After that the boy is responsible for his good or evil actions. The father, therefore, recited the following benediction at the Bar Mitzvah ceremony: "Blessed be thou our God, King of the Universe who has relieved me from punishment for this one (the son)". This did not mean, of course, that the father had no more responsibility for the boy's education and welfare.

To the boy, Bar Mitzvah stood for new duties and privileges, wearing the Tefillin at prayer, and being accepted as one of the ten necessary for a Minyan. He was also entitled to be called up to the Torah, although learned boys enjoyed this privilege at a younger age. Above all, it meant that henceforth he was responsible for his own sins.

The ceremony in the synagogue was simple. On the Sabbath after the thirteenth birthday, the boy was called up to the Torah. The father, too, was honored with an Aliyah, after which he recited the blessing mentioned before. In some communities, during the Middle Ages, Bar Mitzvah boys acted as Hazanim on that Sabbath. Later in the afternoon, a home party was held in honor of the boy. If the Bar Mitzvah lad was a Yeshivah student, he was expected to deliver an oration on some topic from the Talmud. Few of the older men today remember their Bar Mitzvah celebration, for it was not observed then as elaborately as at present.

BAR MITZVAH TODAY

Today Bar Mitzvah is considered one of the main events in the life of a Jewish boy and his family. Even extreme reform Jews and radicals are beginning to reintroduce it.

BAR MITZVAH

Sometimes many months are spent in preparing for the ceremony — learning the Haftorah and blessings, writing and memorizing a speech, and becoming familiar with the Tefillin and their use.

The occasion itself is celebrated in the synagogue and in the home. Relatives and friends come to the synagogue to hear the boy chant the Haftorah and deliver the oration. Sometimes the Bar Mitzvah boy reads from the Sepher Torah. The Rabbi talks to him and blesses him. After the Service, the whole congregation is invited by the family to the vestry-rooms for refreshments. The home party is a truly joyous occasion. The boy receives gifts and congratulations from everyone. True to Jewish tradition, the parents contribute to some worthy cause in honor of their son. Recently, it has become customary to give money to the Jewish National Fund for buying land in Palestine.

Unfortunately, too many boys look upon Bar Mitzvah as the beginning and the end of their Jewish education. Parents frequently postpone enrolling their sons in a Jewish school until a year or so before the date of the ceremony, and withdraw them immediately after. The result is that the boy learns very little except to chant the Haftorah in a parrot-like fashion and to memorize a long-winded speech which he does not understand.

Meaning of the Custom

Why has Bar Mitzvah become more important in our own time when other ceremonies have lost ground? Is it because Bar Mitzvah happens to be one of the customs which can be more easily observed under American conditions? Or is it because a somewhat similar ceremony, confirmation, is observed by Christians? Perhaps in former generations boys

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did not need so much special preparation for the occasion? Probably all of these explanations are true to some extent.

Certainly, few moderns believe that thirteen is the age of responsibility. In fact, today a boy of thirteen is less mature than in the past. Two generations ago most boys had to earn their own livelihood at thirteen and naturally had a greater sense of responsibility. Today we think that children should continue their education at least through high school. Likewise, a boy cannot be considered as having completed his Jewish education when he becomes Bar Mitzvah; neither is he old enough to be a responsible member of the Jewish community.

What Bar Mitzvah signifies is that the child is entering the period of youth, rather than that of manhood. As a Jewish boy, he celebrates this change in himself with an appropriate ceremony. It marks the commencement of a new period in his life, of further Jewish study, and of greater devotion to the faith and ideals of his people. It is a ceremony of commitment to Judaism.

Many parents help their sons carry out their pledges and intentions by enrolling them in Jewish high school classes and in Jewish clubs. The classes enable the boys to enrich their knowledge and understanding of Jewish life, while the clubs offer them an opportunity to work together with others for the welfare of the Jewish community. In some synagogues, Bar Mitzvah Brotherhood clubs are organized for these purposes.

Bat Mitzvah

Bar Mitzvah has been a boy's privilege, for until recently women were not expected to observe most of the customs and ceremonies. This tradition is slowly changing, together

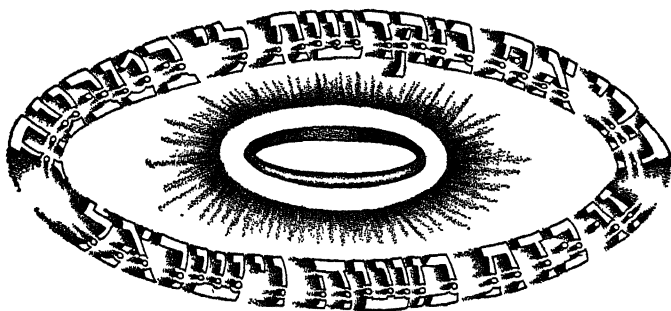
BAR MITZVAH

with the concept in regard to Bar Mitzvah. Today many Jewish girls upon reaching the age of twelve become Bat Mitzvah. The ceremony, both in the synagogue and at home, is quite similar to that for boys.

Confirmation

When Reform Jews broke with Orthodox traditions, many of them discarded also the custom of Bar Mitzvah. But a new ceremony — confirmation — arose in its place, modeled somewhat after the Christian confirmation and communion. No definite age was decided upon, each Temple being free to confirm the boys and girls when it thinks best. In some congregations, however, sixteen is the minimum age. The ceremony is held on Shavuot and resembles the graduation exercises. The girls are dressed in white and the boys in blue. The Rabbi blesses the confirmants individually, and they receive diplomas. Conservative synagogues are also introducing this new ceremony for the graduates from the elementary department of the Sunday School.

Bar Mitzvah is a most significant personal religious ceremony in the life of the Jew. We should be glad that it has risen to such importance in our own time, serving to make Jewish living more significant and to preserve the Jewish faith and heritage. However, it should be remembered that Bar Mitzvah stands for both completion and beginning — the completion of one period in the child's education and the beginning of a new period. Boys who carry out in a practical manner the duties and privileges which Bar Mitzvah signifies are able to look back with real pride and joy to the festive and impressive ceremony that comes but once in the life of a Jew.



Chapter Six

MARRIAGE CUSTOMS

THE Bar Mitzvah boy and the Bat Mitzvah girl have grown up and are now ready for the most important occasion of all — the wedding day.

Marriage is indeed the most momentous event in the life of a person. Upon it depends the happiness of the two young persons about to be married, of their immediate relatives, and of the children to come. No wonder parents have been so anxious that their sons and daughters marry well and that the wedding be a truly joyous occasion. Marriage also means another Jewish home. Will it be a Bayit Ne'eman, a faithful Jewish home? One Hebrew term for marriage is Kidushin, meaning a holy, sacred event.

Uppermost in the minds of the couple entering wedlock is the desire for children and for companionship. The child has been considered by Jews, even since olden times, as the greatest of human treasures. To beget children and to raise them, therefore, became a religious commandment. Companionship between man and woman has also been con-

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sidered as essential for happiness. "He who has no wife," says the Talmud, "abides without goodness, help, joy, blessing and atonement."

Ban on Intermarriage

Anxiety for the happiness of the new family is partly responsible for the ban on intermarriage. Jews have found during their long history that there cannot be true companionship between husband and wife who are of different races and religions. They usually disagree on too many things to live harmoniously together. When children arrive, they are pulled in different directions by the father and mother, which makes them quite miserable.

But there has always been, and there is today, another reason for the ban on Jews marrying out of their faith — concern for the existence of the Jewish people. In most cases of intermarriage, the Jew so married and the resulting offspring break away from the Jewish community. Had intermarriage been permitted during all the centuries of living in strange lands, it is doubtful whether the Jews as a people would be alive today. To marry out of the fold, therefore, has been considered an act of disloyalty to Israel, unless, of course, the non-Jew is converted to the Jewish faith. Parents have been known to mourn after children who married non-Jews, as if they had died, considering it the greatest misfortune that can befall a family.

There are also restrictions against marrying close blood relations. The Bible and Talmud specify forty-two kinds of relatives which one may not marry, including aunts, nieces, step-mothers, step-fathers, and many others. The marriage of cousins is not prohibited; but custom has been opposed to this practice. The chief explanation for these restrictions

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is that marriage among close relatives has been found to result in weak, crippled and otherwise abnormal children.

First known Jewish Wedding

Do you remember the story of the marriage of Isaac and Rebecca? It is the first Jewish marriage of which we have any record. The description in the Bible of the courtship and wedding feast is worth rereading. It tells us that already in those days Jews married among their own people, that the girl was consulted before her parents consented to the match, and that the real consideration in choosing a wife, and no doubt also a husband, was good character. This story has served as a guide to millions of Jewish parents throughout the centuries.

The first Jewish wedding was celebrated with feasting, dancing, singing and presentation of gifts. All these we have at modern weddings. But new customs have since been added: the marriage ceremony proper being the most important of all. Were we to attend Jewish weddings in Buchara, Yemen, Palestine, Poland, and several other countries, we would probably see most of the marriage customs observed by Jews in their long history. Everywhere, as is true among all other peoples, marriage is both a solemn and a festive event.

Engagement or Airusin

Most couples today become engaged without any ceremony or celebration, and also without the help of a Shadchan or matchmaker. In former generations, the betrothed couple felt offended if no engagement party were held. At the betrothal, the respective parents agreed on the Tenaim or terms of the marriage, including the dowry to be given

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by the bride, the gifts expected of the groom, and the date of the wedding. This was followed by an appropriate ceremony. Everyone then wished the couple and their parents MAZAL TOV, presented gifts to the prospective bride and groom, and proceeded to spend the rest of the evening in a festive manner. Such engagement parties are still held in thousands of Jewish homes, but the actual ceremonies of both the betrothal and the marriage take place at the time of the wedding.

Time of Weddings

The favorite time for weddings among Jews is immediately after Shavuot or in June. Between Shavuot and Pesach, the Sefirah season, no weddings may be held, except on Lag Beomer. During the "Three Weeks" before Tishah Beav, too, they are prohibited. It is also forbidden to hold marriage ceremonies on the Sabbath and holidays. Mourners of close relatives must wait at least a month since the death of the departed before getting married. In the Middle Ages, Friday was the popular day for weddings, so that festivities could continue on the Sabbath when the people were free from work.

On the Sabbath before the ceremony, the Hatan, as well as the close relatives, are called up to the Torah in the synagogue. After the service, the family usually invites the congregation for refreshments in the vestry-rooms. The bride and her family are also present on this occasion. This custom is explained in the Talmud as follows: "King Solomon had a special gate for bridegrooms, built in the Temple, where the inhabitants of Jerusalem would gather on the Sabbath to congratulate the fortunate young men. After the destruction of the Temple, it was ordained by the sages

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that the bridegrooms should go to the synagogue so that the local residents may see them and congratulate them."

It is also customary that the bride and groom fast on the wedding day until after the ceremony, for on that day they are forgiven all their sins, unless, of course, the marriage is held on Lag Beomer, Hanukah, Rosh Hodesh, or some other festive occasion.

Place of Weddings

Weddings were held in the synagogue, in a community building, in the home, or in the rabbi's study. The synagogue was the favorite place for marriages in the Middle Ages because of its sacredness and because it had room for a larger number of guests. The feast which followed was held at the bride's home. In order to accommodate everyone, including the poor and the beggars, tables were set with food and cleared several times. The synagogue is still preferred by many Jews, although of late more and more weddings are celebrated in hotels, where caterers take over the work of preparing and serving the food. Quiet weddings are usually held in the home of the bride, or, less frequently, in the rabbi's study.

The Hupah

One old custom is observed as widely and strictly today as in previous centuries, namely, conducting the marriage ceremony under a Hupah or canopy. The Hupah represents the litter in which the bride was carried in the wedding procession of long ago. It stands for the future home and family of the newly married couple, and adds beauty and sacredness to the wedding ceremony. In ancient times, the four posts of the Hupah were made from branches of

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the two trees which had been planted on Hamishah Asar Bishevat of the year when each of the couple was born.

Everyone puts on his best attire for a wedding. The bride, however, looks most distinctive in her white dress with its train, a wreath in her hair, and the veil. In ancient times the groom also wore a garland of roses, myrtle and olive branches tied together with threads of gold and crimson. The bride's white dress and veil exemplify purity. Tradition tells that being of the same color as shrouds, they are also a symbol of mourning after the Temple.

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CEREMONY AND ENTERTAINMENT

The groom is the first to be led under the Hupah, by his parents, to the accompaniment of wedding music. Then comes the bride, escorted by her father and mother. The Mesader Kidushin, usually a rabbi, welcomes the couple by saying: "Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord," and several similarly appropriate passages. This is followed by a short



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talk on the seriousness of marriage and the ideals which should guide the young couple. After the rabbi recites the blessing over a cup of wine, the groom places the wedding-ring on the forefinger of the bride's right hand, and says to her: "HAREY AT MEKUDESHEET LI BETABAAT ZU KEDAT MOSHEH VE' YISRAEL. (You are hereby betrothed to me by token of this ring in accordance with the law of Moses and Israel.)" The bride and groom each take a sip from the cup of wine, as a sign that henceforth they will share in everything.

Next the Ketubah, or marriage contract, is read to the couple. The Ketubah, written in Aramaic, tells what the obligations of man to woman are in married life. The "Seven Blessings" follow, chanted by the rabbi or Hazan. At orthodox weddings, the bride is led around the groom seven times before these benedictions are chanted. One of the blessings reads as follows:

"Blessed be thou, O Lord, our God, King of the universe, who hast created joy and gladness, bridegroom and bride, mirth and exultation, pleasure and delight, love, brotherhood, peace and fellowship. Soon may there be heard in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, the voice of joy and gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the jubilant voice of bridegrooms from their canopy, and of youths from their feast of song. Blessed be thou, O Lord, who makest the bridegroom to rejoice with the bride."

Finally, the groom breaks the glass under his heel, and everyone greets the couple with the words Mazal Tov, Good Luck. This custom of breaking the glass has two explanations. One is to recall the destruction of the Jewish state and the Temple, for "on the day of chiefest joy" Jews have always remembered the loss of country and Temple. The

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other explanation is that family life is in danger of being shattered as glass if the husband and wife are not kindly, loving and considerate to one another.

A shower of rice or other seeds greets the couple as they step from under the Hupah. This is an ancient custom among Jews as well as among other people, being a way of wishing the newly-weds happiness, prosperity and children. In Talmudic times, barley seeds would be planted several days before so that they might sprout before the wedding day as a sign of fertility.

Wedding Entertainment

Dancing, singing and feasting follow the ceremony. There are many Jewish wedding dances, the Shereleh and the Brogez Tanz being the best known, danced to tuneful Jewish music. In recent years, the Palestinian Horah dance has become popular at weddings. There are also many Jewish wedding songs, some of them composed by such famous poets as Judah Halevi and Abraham ibn Ezra. Most entertaining of all is the Badchan or bard who sings humorous ballads to the bride and groom, to their parents, and to the more distinguished guests. At one time, plays were presented at weddings. Unfortunately, these distinctive features of entertainment at Jewish weddings are rarely seen in America.

There have been other forms of wedding entertainment. Invitations to the prominent guests would be extended with music and ballads by a band who went from home to home. We can picture the gaiety in the community on that day. The bride and groom, separately, were led to the Hupah in a street procession headed by musicians and dancers. During the festivities, which sometimes continued for seven days, the gifts to the young people were presented

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to the accompaniment of music and humorous verses by the Badchan, as may still be seen in Oriental and East European Jewish communities.

In order to witness all the wedding customs, described, one would have to attend a number of ceremonies. But some of these rites — the Hupah, reading the Ketubah, placement of the ring on the bride's finger, and drinking from the same cup of wine — are observed by all Jews in the United States. American Jews have also borrowed several new customs from their neighbors — the best man, the maid of honor, the ushers and bride's-maids, and the ceremonious march to the canopy. These and other features tend to make Jewish weddings in America rather pompous and formal.

DIVORCE

At the wedding, the newly-weds feel confident of each other's love, and of their ability to live happily together, and they look hopefully forward to a permanent marriage. For the great majority of men and women, this expectation of a life-long companionship comes true. For the few, a time comes when they are no longer able to live together.

The Jews have believed, since ancient times, that when a man and a woman can no longer tolerate each other as husband and wife, it is better that they separate. However, this sacred relationship must not be severed without good and sufficient cause. Neither may the wife be divorced against her will unless she is unfaithful. In the Ketubah, or marriage contract, it is provided that in case of divorce, the wife shall receive alimony. This was intended to prevent hasty separation.

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The power to grant a divorce rests in the hands of a rabbi or a Bet Din, who guide themselves by Jewish law as well as by the law of the country of which they are subjects. When man and woman apply to the rabbi for a divorce, even if they are both decided, he first talks with them at length and tries hard to persuade them to change their minds. Then, following the Jewish law, he delays the writing and delivery of the *GET* or divorce as long as possible, in the hope that, in the meantime, they will be reconciled.

In America, as in every land, Jews are governed in matters of marriage and divorce by the laws of the country as well as by the Jewish law. Rabbis require a marriage license before performing the ceremony. In cases of divorced persons who are marrying again, they must show proof that they have been legally separated in accordance with the laws of the state and country. Similarly, a Jewish divorce is valid only if there is also a legal divorce.

From the days of Isaac and Rebekkah to the present time, Jews have celebrated the marriage ceremony in keeping with the dignity and festivity which the occasion deserves. Getting married has always meant beginning a life-long companionship, to rear a family and establish a loyal home in Israel. For upon the home depends the personal character of the Jew, the transmission of the Jewish heritage and the perpetuation of the Jewish people, as well as the welfare of the American nation. The Jewish laws and customs were intended to assure a permanent, happy marriage, and to bring joy and color to Jewish living. Moreover, the uniform rites at Jewish weddings throughout the world have helped to maintain unity and common faith. These high purposes the laws and customs serve also at present.



Chapter Seven

BURIAL AND MOURNING RITES

THE purchase of the Cave of Machpelah, so vividly described in Genesis, is more than the first record of burial customs among Jews, for this story reveals to us the reverence which Abraham showed for his dead. So anxious was

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the patriarch to give his wife an honorable final resting-place that no price was too high. Abraham, of course, wished to provide a burial place also for himself and his descendants. The Cave of Machpelah, located in Hebron, Palestine, became one of the holy shrines in the country, being the spot where Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekkah, and Jacob and Leah were buried.

This attitude of reverence and honor for the dead has remained a distinguishing characteristic of Jewish life ever since those ancient times, serving to strengthen family ties and to carry on family traditions. There are numerous times during the year when children are expected to remember their departed parents with special prayers and ceremonies. On major holidays, memorial services are held in the synagogue. At certain seasons, respect is paid to the memory of the dead by visiting their graves. Once every year, the Yahrzeit or death anniversary is observed.

BURIAL CUSTOMS

Everyone realizes that death is inevitable. Nevertheless, when it strikes, family and friends are deeply grieved. Days, months and even years pass before the living reconcile themselves to the fact that the loved one is gone forever. While it is still in the coffin, one hopes vainly that the inert body may arise and live again. But false hopes and wishes are sternly pushed aside, and the family proceeds with the grim task of preparing the corpse and laying it to eternal rest in a dignified and honorable manner.

The first rite to be performed takes place before the dying person breathes his last. This is the *Viddui* or Confession which he is asked to recite when the end seems certain,

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a rite connected with the belief of life after death. The Confession reads in part as follows:

May it be Thy will to heal me completely. Yet if it is determined that I die, I will accept it at Thy hand with love. . . . Father of the fatherless and judge of the widow, protect my beloved ones. . . . Hear O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is One.

Keriah

When the end finally comes, the first words uttered are: BARUCH DAYAN EMET, Blessed be the True Judge, thereby acknowledging the truth that while death is tragic, it is the earthly destiny of all human beings, and must be accepted with courage. Immediately after, close relatives perform the KERIAH custom by making a slight tear in their clothing as a sign of mourning. On Sabbaths and holidays, however, it is not permissible to wear clothes so torn. As another expression of grief, mirrors and other decorative objects in the house are usually covered up or put away. Then, a large candle is lighted, which is renewed and kept burning for thirty days, except on the Sabbath, in reverence for the dead.

Preparing the Body

The family spares no trouble to pay the last appropriate honors to the dead. In ancient times, the wealthy buried their dead in costly garments, together with jewelry. Later this custom was prohibited because it humiliated the poor, who could not afford similar honors for their dead. All are equal after death, the rabbis of the Talmud said, and they prescribed plain white TACHRICHIN or shrouds for rich and poor alike. Jews have followed this principle ever since. Today, after the corpse is bathed and cleaned, it is

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clothed in white linen or cotton TACHRICHIN. The coffin, too, must be simple and inexpensive.

Funeral parlors were unknown until recent times. To-day, too, many prefer to have the body kept in the home until the funeral procession. Whether at home or in the memorial chapel, the body is never left alone. Relatives, friends or persons specially engaged for this purpose keep watch day and night, the pious chanting Psalms. Two large candles, placed at the head of the coffin, burn continuously until the body is removed from the room.

Before the days of professional undertakers, all burial tasks were performed by a volunteer society of pious Jews known as Hevra Kadisha or Holy Society. They stayed with the dying during the final hours; they prepared, cleansed and shrouded the corpse; they accompanied the body to the cemetery, carrying it if necessary; and they buried it in accordance with the prescribed religious rites. All Jews, rich and poor, availed themselves of the Hevra Kadisha, but its services were especially welcome to the poor who could not afford all the usual expenses involved. Such burial societies, connected with orthodox and conservative congregations, are still in existence in every Jewish community.

Halvayah and Hespel

The Halvayah or funeral procession, too, must be simple. In small communities, where the burial ground is within walking distance, the coffin is carried by relatives and close friends, everybody else following on foot. In the large cities, the body is conveyed to the cemetery by hearse, followed by mourners in automobiles. To take part in a Halvayah has been considered a Mitzvah and a duty. In the Middle

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Ages, all shops would be closed during the funeral and every one would join in the procession. Today, too, pious Jews will go out of their way to pay the last honors even to one whom they knew but slightly.

It is customary to stop the procession at the synagogue for a *HESPED* or eulogy of the deceased. Persons who have been prominent in civic affairs are eulogized at the institution in which they have been most active. The eulogy is delivered by the rabbi or by some other learned person.

In the all-Jewish city of Tel Aviv, Palestine, prominent citizens are accorded a most impressive public funeral. Schools, stores and factories close. Every child, man and woman comes out to pay his respects to the deceased leader. Thousands march in the silent procession through the main streets of the city, while multitudes line the sidewalks, standing with bowed heads as the bier is carried by.

Duty of a Jewish Burial

The Hebrew term for cemetery is *Bet Almin*, Eternal Home. Every Jewish community has one or more cemeteries, and no matter how small the community, one of its first civic concerns is to provide a *BET ALMIN*. For the duty of burying a Jew among his own people is one of the most basic traditions of Judaism. Not to be brought to *Kever Yisrael* (Jewish grave) is considered a family as well as a communal disgrace. Even those who in their lifetime had no Jewish interests are buried among their own. Families usually provide themselves with burial plots so that close relatives may lie together in the Eternal Home.

Pious Jews direct that a little sack of Palestine soil be placed into their coffin. Having been denied the opportunity to live and die in *Eretz Yisrael*, they yearn to be buried

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with a bit of the soil of the Holy Land. This also explains the custom of placing the body with the head to the East — Zionward. Another distinctive Jewish burial custom is giving charity to the poor or making contributions to some Jewish institutions.

At the Cemetery

The burial rites at the cemetery consist of appropriate prayers chanted by the Rabbi or Hazan. The selections rendered before the coffin is lowered into the grave express the Jew's faith in God and the hopefulness inspired by his faith.

Who dare say, "What doest Thou?" to Him who
ruleth above and below, who taketh away life and
giveth it?

The Lord hath given and the Lord hath taken.
Praised be the name of the Lord.

After the grave is filled in — the first spadefuls by family and friends and the rest by members of the Hevra Kadisha or by workers — the famous El Maley Rahamim is recited. It is followed by the chanting of two Psalms which say, in effect, that the important thing in life is not wealth and riches but a life of righteousness:

Be not thou afraid when one waxeth rich,
When the wealth of his house is increased;
For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away;
His wealth shall not descend after him.

I have the Lord always before me;
Surely He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.
Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth.
Thou makest me know the path of life;

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In Thy path is fulness of joy,
In Thy right hand bliss for evermore.

Then the Kaddish is recited by the sons of the deceased or by a close relative. The Kaddish speaks of the greatness of God, of redemption from exile, and of everlasting peace in Messianic times. As the mourners leave the burial ground, they are consoled with the words:

May the Omnipotent comfort you together with all
the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

MOURNING CUSTOMS

Upon returning home a hard-boiled egg and a little ashes are placed before the mourners. The egg, being a symbol of life, reminds them that while death is inescapable, the living must face the future with faith and hope. The ashes, as a sign of mourning, date back to ancient times when ashes and earth were strewn on the head in times of misfortune. With this simple rite begins the period of Shivah, the seven days of mourning. Relatives and friends come to visit the mourners and to console them. The bereaved usually sit on low stools during Shivah. Later in the day, the mourners are served a meal prepared by a neighbor. Providing such a meal, which is known as Seudath Havraah, a Meal of Condolence, is considered a Mitzvah.

Seven and Thirty

The duty of sitting Shivah is incumbent only upon close relatives, including parents, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters and husband or wife. If the Sabbath or a major holiday falls during the week of Shivah, the custom is interrupted for the day or days, so that the festive occasion

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may be properly observed. Throughout the seven days, the memorial lamp is kept lighted in memory of the dead.

Since the mourners are not allowed to leave the house, except on the Sabbath or holiday for a walk to the synagogue, services are conducted in the home on weekdays. At each service the children recite the Kaddish prayer, which is continued daily for eleven months. If a person dies childless, the nearest male relative may say the Kaddish, or a pious Jew is engaged to recite it daily.

The first month after the death is known as Sheloshim or thirty. During these thirty days it is unseemly for the mourners to go to theaters, concerts, or parties; and, in general they must abstain from pleasures and entertainments. In some families this custom is continued for twelve months.

A Year Later

The tombstone is unveiled on or before the first death-anniversary. Again relatives and friends come to pay their respects to the deceased. The ceremony, which begins with the unveiling of the stone, consists of reciting several Psalms, the chanting of the El Maley Rahamim hymn, and the saying of Kaddish by the nearest of kin. One of the prayers recited is the famous Psalm: "The Lord is my Shepherd."

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;
He leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul;
He guideth me in straight paths for His name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow
of death,
I will fear no evil,
For Thou art with me;
Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.

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Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of
mine enemies;

Thou hast anointed my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days
of my life.

And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Psalm XXXIII.

The tombstone may be plain or elaborate, depending on the family's means, and is usually decorated with Jewish designs and inscribed with Hebrew letters. By paying a certain sum yearly to the management of the cemetery, the grave is kept in good condition and decorated with grass and flowers all year around.

Yahrzeit Every Year

Every year the death anniversary is observed at home and in the synagogue. At home a memorial lamp or a tallow candle within a glass is lit at sunset and allowed to burn until the next sunset. Naturally the mourners do not indulge in any entertainment. Men and boys attend synagogue services and recite the Kaddish in the evening as well as on the following morning and afternoon. Many pay a visit to the grave during the day. On the preceding or following Sabbath, Monday or Thursday the men are called up to the Torah in the synagogue. The Yahrzeit custom is widely observed in every Jewish community of the world.

On Holidays

Sons and daughters memorialize their dead parents not only on Yahrzeit day but also on certain holidays, namely on Yom Kippur, on Shemini Atzeret, on the last day of

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Pesach, and on the second day of Shavuot. The Memorial Service in the synagogue takes place immediately after the reading of the Torah. Each person reads silently several prayers, in one of which he mentions the name of the parent. The Cantor chants the El Maley Rahamim prayer on behalf of the whole congregation. In some synagogues it is customary to have the Hazan or Shamash read aloud the names of individuals whom their children or the community wish to be honored in this public manner.

In the closing prayer of the Memorial Service, the congregation chants:

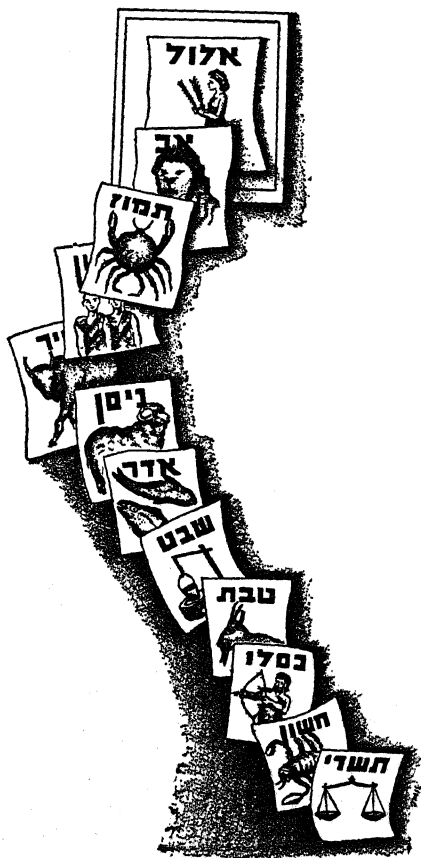
May Thy lovingkindness not depart from us. Give us our needful sustenance, and let us not be in want of gifts from flesh and blood. Remove from us all worry and grief, distress and fear, shame and contempt. Let Thy grace be with us, that we may rear our children to keep Thy commandments and to fulfill Thy will all the days of this life. . . . O God, take us not hence in the midst of our days. . . . Help us . . . to conduct ourselves honestly and wholeheartedly during the years of our sojourn (upon the earth).

While the burial and mourning customs described herein are not observed by all Jews to the same extent and in the same manner, some of them are kept by every Jew who is devoted to his people and its faith. For the memory of parents, relatives and friends, no longer among the living, is precious to all, as is true among other peoples. These customs, particularly the Yahrzeit and the Memorial Services on holidays, serve to keep alive family traditions and ideals, as well as to strengthen Jewish home life and Judaism generally.

Chapter Eight

THE JEWISH CALENDAR

WHEN is Pesach this year? Why does the Jewish leap year have a whole extra month? Why do we celebrate Shavuot two days? How does it happen that Jews have no special



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names for the days of the week? How does the Jewish calendar differ from the civil calendar? Why do we have a separate Jewish calendar? How often do we have occasion to ask and answer these and similar questions? Educated Jews think nothing at all of being able to explain these questions.

The Jewish calendar is indispensable in every Jewish home. We keep it where we can lay hands on it easily whenever a date has to be looked up. Many carry one with them. Without a Jewish calendar we would be at sea as to Jewish events and holidays.

BEGINNINGS OF THE JEWISH CALENDAR

The story of the Jewish calendar begins some time in the ancient past, somewhere in the desert where our earliest ancestors lived as nomads. They had no definite calendar at the time, but they must have had some way of computing time with the sun and the moon as their chief guides.

Day and night are determined by the Sun, and so are the seasons of the year. Our ancestors must have noticed that the Sun is not the same at all times. There are months when the Sun rises early and sets late. At this period it gives off more heat and light. At other times the sun rises later and sets earlier. During this period rains are most frequent and it is much colder. And so the sun became the guide for the seasons of the year.

As nomads wandering from one oasis to another in search of water and pasture for their flocks, the early Hebrews were chiefly concerned with the seasons. Winter meant rains, and rains brought grass and water. Summer meant absence of rain. To be prepared for this period they had to

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know where water and grass were likely to be found. And so the first beginnings of the calendar may have been the division of the year into two main seasons, Winter and Summer. The years, too, they counted by the Sun, as we do to-day. They also noticed the changes in the moon and were guided by it in counting time, as will be described later.

After many centuries, our ancestors ceased leading a nomadic life and settled in Palestine as an agricultural people. Now it became necessary to have a better calendar. A farmer must plan his work ahead. He has to know when to plow and plant, when to cultivate and when to harvest. Each grain, vegetable and fruit-tree requires attention at certain definite times. This is especially true in Palestine where vegetation grows throughout the year.

A Farmer's Calendar

The Jewish farmers in Palestine, therefore, had to devise a more detailed calendar to guide them in their work. One such calendar, written on a clay tablet by a farmhand, was excavated in a mound near the ancient city of Gezer. Fortunately, it was buried beneath piles of soil and rubbish, and was in this way preserved from disintegration. It is written in ancient Hebrew script, which is somewhat different from the present square Hebrew letters. The part of the calendar which could be deciphered by scholars reads as follows:

“A month of fruit harvest. A month of sowing.
A month of after-grass. A month of flax harvest.
A month of barley harvest. A month of everything else.
A month of vine pruning. A month of fig harvest.”

This is the earliest Hebrew calendar known. But there have been others, and more detailed. Although writing was

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then known by very few people, many things were written down; but during the course of centuries these records disappeared.

Moon or Lunar Months

You will notice that the farmer of ancient Gezer reckoned time by months. We do not know when Jews, as well as other peoples, first began to divide the year into months. No doubt this began in the hoary past, many centuries before Abraham.

Our forefathers noticed also the movements and changes of the moon in the sky, how it waxes and wanes with such regularity, and it was natural for them to utilize also the moon as a guide in telling time, not by seasons but for shorter periods. A farmhand hiring himself out for the harvest season may have told his family to expect him back home after so many moons. Gradually, a unit of time was considered equivalent to the period it takes for the moon to travel around the earth. In fact, the word month comes from the word moon. In Hebrew the word Hodesh is used. Hodesh, meaning new, is the period of time from one new moon to the next.

FROM ORAL TO WRITTEN CALENDAR

Since, in those days they knew very little about astronomy, our ancestors could not figure out in advance the beginning of each month and, therefore, the dates of the festivals. They had to depend on actual observation of the new moon. The power to announce the new month was left to persons in authority. At the time of the First Temple, most

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likely the High Priest or the King had this power. In the days of the Second Temple, we know definitely the Sanhedrin announced the new moon and set the dates of the holidays. The Sanhedrin was both the supreme court and the legislative body of the Jewish nation.

Announcing the New Moon

On the last day of the month, people in Jerusalem would watch for the appearance of the new moon. The head of the Sanhedrin and several of the elders were assembled in the Temple courtyard all that day waiting for the news. Those first to notice the slightest crescent in the sky would rush to the Temple and inform the Sanhedrin. When after questioning the witnesses as to the position, size and shape of the crescent, the officials were convinced that the evidence was correct, the Shofar would be blown and the beginning of the month announced.

That night, torches and bonfires would be lit on the highest peaks near the city. These were signals to nearby towns and villages that the new moon had been officially declared. The people in these places would in turn light bonfires and torches as signals to more distant settlements. They in turn would notify sections still farther away. All night long these fire signals would carry the news, until the whole country was informed. The following day was celebrated as Rosh Hodesh festival. Even the Jews of Babylonia were informed of the new moon by a relay of torches and bonfires. To more distant countries, like Egypt, Rome and Persia, messengers were sent to apprise them of the exact dates of Rosh Hodesh and of the holidays.

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Why a Fixed Calendar

In times of peace, the Jews of ancient Palestine seemed satisfied with this month-to-month calendar. Unfortunately, troublesome times overcame the Holy Land. The Romans made themselves masters of the country. Often these conquerors interfered with the observance of Jewish laws and customs, and prevented the Sanhedrin from carrying on its responsibilities. At such times there was confusion as to the dates of the new moon and of the festivals. In addition, the Samaritans, who were unfriendly to the Jews, would occasionally light torches at the wrong times in order to confuse the people. This was true during the existence of the Temple, but even more so after the Jewish State was destroyed and the Temple burned down.

For the Jewries of other countries, the lack of a definite, fixed calendar had always been extremely inconvenient. They could not very well depend on signals and messages, for frequently the messages would arrive too late. They found it necessary, therefore, to observe two days of Rosh Hodesh. If a festival occurred during the month, they could not be certain of the exact date. So they began to celebrate two Sedarim on Pesach, two days of Shavuot, and two days on Succot.

The time had arrived for writing down the calendar. Jews now had more exact knowledge about the movements of the moon and could figure out to the second when the new moon would appear each month. Also the dispersion of the Jews over many countries made a written calendar an absolute necessity. Some of the Patriarchs, as the heads of Palestine Jewry were called then, began to work out a fixed calendar. Rabbi Gamaliel, Rabbi Ishmael and Judah Hanasi were among the first to experiment with it. The fact that

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the Romans had adopted a fixed calendar prepared by Julius Caesar must have proved helpful. And so it happened that in the fourth century, the Patriarch Hillel the Second (360-65 C. E.) wrote down definite rules for the calendar, and had them adopted by the Jewish communities of the world.

HILLEL'S CALENDAR

What were some of the calendar rules which Hillel adopted? Since the Jewish calendar used at present is the one worked out then, it is important that some of the rules be understood clearly. It should be borne in mind that Hillel did not invent a new or different calendar. All he did was to write down the customs and regulations which were followed by the Jewish people at that time.

Solar Year

One definite rule adopted was that the year is to be a solar year — the period of time it takes for the earth to make a complete circuit around the sun, exactly 365 days, 12 hours and 49 minutes. Of course, at that time, it was not known that the earth revolves around the sun. What they figured out was the exact time it takes for the sun to reach a certain position in the sky each year.

Lunar Months

Another rule written down was that the months are to be lunar months. A lunar or moon month is the period of time it takes the moon to travel around the earth — from one moon to the next new moon. This month is 29 days, 12 hours, and 44 minutes long.

A lunar year of twelve months has 354 days, 8 hours and

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48 minutes, or about eleven days less than a solar year. Something had to be done about this difference. Otherwise the months and festivals would keep slipping back. After ten years, Pesach would slip back 110 days and would be celebrated in January. In another ten years it would fall in September. This would be true of each holiday. Imagine the confusion if nothing were done to square this difference between the solar and lunar years.

Jewish Leap Years

This difficulty had always existed. When the Sanhedrin determined the calendar month by month, they would announce a leap year with an extra month every so often in order to prevent the months and festivities from slipping back. Now Hillel worked out a definite rule for leap years. The rule is that during every nineteen years there are to be seven leap years, with each leap year having a whole extra month. These leap years are to fall on the 3rd, 6th, 8th, 11th, 14th, 17th and 19th years. Once this simple rule was adopted, every Jewish community could figure out when leap years should occur. (See if you can figure out the leap years for the next century. Begin with the year 5701 as the first year in the present cycle of 19 years.) The extra month is added to the last month or Adar, and is called Adar Sheni or Second Adar.

Length of the Months

It was also fixed at the time how many days each month should have. As previously mentioned, a complete journey of the moon around the earth takes 29 days, 12 hours and 44 seconds. For practical purposes a month should consist of a definite number of full days. Hillel ruled that five

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months should have 30 days each, five months should be defective with 29 days each, and two months vary from year to year. This arrangement holds true to this day. The months Nissan, Sivan, Av, Tishri and Shevat have 30 days each; Iyar, Tamuz, Elul, Tevet and Adar have 29 days each, Heshvan and Kislev may have 29 or 30 days each.

Two Days of Holidays

By the time the Jewish calendar was written down in the fourth century, the custom of celebrating certain festivals two days instead of one was widely observed by Jews in many countries. This began, you will recall, when there was no fixed calendar and Jews at a distance from Palestine could not be certain of the exact dates. When the calendar was adopted, the custom remained for all Jews living outside of Palestine. It had become a sacred tradition not to be broken, even though the reason for an extra day no longer held. This custom is now practiced by all but Reform Jews. In Palestine, only one day is observed, as in the past.

NAMES OF YEARS, MONTHS AND DAYS

The story of the Jewish calendar would not be complete without an explanation about the names of the years, months, and days of the week. There are also other interesting facts and ideas in connection with the calendar worth explaining.

Numbering the Years

In ancient times the Jews kept record of the years by some important event or by the reign of a king. The Bible contains many such expressions as "in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel," and "in the first year of Cyrus,

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king of Persia," and "two years before the earthquake."

This was the custom also among other ancient peoples — Babylonians, Greeks, Persians and Romans. Later in their history the Romans began counting the years from the year Rome was thought to have been founded. In the sixth century, the Christians commenced to date the years from the birth of Christ, and this practice has remained. The letters A. D. stand for Anno Domini, the Latin words meaning the year of our Lord, while B. C. stand for "before Christ." 1941 then means one thousand, nine hundred and forty-one years since the birth of Christ.

Needless to say, the Jews did not accept this dating system. Instead, they adopted the method of numbering the years from the time of Adam and Eve, as accounted for in the Bible. The Jewish calendar year 5700, for example, means, 5,700 years since the creation. In Hebrew, the letters e'r are used: r=400; e=300. The figure 5000 is designated by the letter o which has a numerical value of five, but it is rarely used.

Jewish teachers and scholars who use the civil calendar usually employ the letters C. E. instead of A. D.; and B. C. E. instead of B. C. B. C. E. stands for "before common era." C. E. for "common era." Thus the rededication of the Temple by the Maccabees is dated 135 B. C. E. which means 135 years before the year one. The Temple of Jerusalem was destroyed in the year 70 C. E., which means 70 years after the year one. This practice is spreading among all Jews.

Names and Symbols of Months

There was a time when Jews did not have names for all the months. In the earlier books of the Bible we find only a

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few months with names. One is AVIV, which means spring or ear of corn. Another is ETANIM, hardy fruit. In the later books we do find names for all the months. Evidently these names were borrowed from Babylonia, where Jews were exiled when the First Temple was destroyed, since the names of the Babylonian months are practically identical with those of the Hebrew.

The English names of the months are in honor of emperors and gods. July is after Julius Caesar, and March named for Mars. Other months, like September and December, are derived from the Latin and stand for seven and ten respectively, for at one time they were seventh and tenth in the Roman calendar.

The Hebrew months describe the season of the year when they occur. Nissan, the first month, evidently means flower, for it comes when Palestine is bedecked with flowers. Elul, the sixth month, means gathering. It falls at the beginning of the fruit harvest. Kislev, the eighth on the calendar, is thought to mean the season of mud and rain, being one of the rainiest months in Palestine. Iyar means blossom; Sivan, splendor; Tamuz, parched earth; Adar, beauty.

In the course of time the months also acquired symbols or signs, known as the Zodiac. These symbols have been known and used by many peoples. Jews have utilized them for decoration. Thus the floor of an ancient synagogue excavated recently in Palestine has a mosaic design of the symbols of the twelve months. The symbol for Nissan is a lamb, which to Jews may be a reminder of the Paschal lamb. The design for Sivan is twins, which the Rabbis explained as representing Jacob and Esau.

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The Week

In the Jewish calendar, as in the civil calendar, the week consists of seven days. The only difference is that Jews rest on the last day of the week while Christians observe the Sabbath on Sunday. At one time Christians also observed the Jewish Sabbath. Later on, the early Christians changed it to Sunday in order to be different from the Jews.

No one knows surely why the week in the civil calendar has seven days. The Christians adopted the seven-day week from the Jews and also from the Romans. The early Hebrews, like the Babylonians, were most likely led to count time by weeks of seven days because of the apparent phases of the moon which change approximately every seven days. Among the Romans, historians believe, the seven-day week was derived chiefly from the fact that the seven heavenly bodies — the sun, the moon and five planets — played such an important role in their religion and mythology.

Names of the Days

In fact, the days of the week are so named. Sunday is the sun's day. Monday is the moon's day. Saturday is Saturn's day. The other days are named in honor of Mars, Mercury, Jupiter and Venus, but their names in English come to us from the Saxon language. Tuesday is Tiw's day; Wednesday is Woden's day; Thursday is Thor's day; and Friday is Frigg's day. Tiw corresponds to Mars, Woden to Mercury, Thor to Jupiter and Frigg to Venus.

It is easy to understand why the Jews did not adopt these names for the days of the week. Jews followed their own religion, which teaches that God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. In the Bible, the days are called by their numbers, First, Second, Third, and so on.

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In modern Palestine, where Hebrew is spoken and Jews are free to follow their own customs, the days are called by their numbers. The seventh day, of course, is called Shabbat or Sabbath, which means rest, as it has been known since ancient times.

Of the six work days, Jews have attached greater importance to some than to others. On Mondays and Thursdays, special selections are added to the daily prayers, and a portion of the Torah is read in the synagogue. In ancient Palestine, Monday and Thursday were market days. Being occasions when large numbers of farmers and merchants gathered in the synagogues, they were utilized for reading and expounding selections from the Torah as part of the morning service. Friday, of course, is Erev Shabbat, and some of the spirit of the Sabbath is felt in good Jewish homes on that day, especially in the afternoon. The day in the Jewish calendar begins with sunset and ends with the following sunset.

IMPORTANCE AND USE OF JEWISH CALENDAR

A hundred years ago, Jewish business men dated their bills, notes and records with Hebrew dates. Employees received their wages in accordance with the Hebrew months. Birthdays and anniversaries were celebrated by the Jewish calendar. When writing letters, it was customary to indicate also the Sidrah or portion of the week. In short, the Jewish calendar was used in the same way as the civil calendar is employed today. Only in dealing with non-Jews were the Christian dates used.

In those days Jews lived largely apart from the general community. The residents of a Jewish town in Russia, for

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example, had few dealings with non-Jews of a kind which required the use of a calendar. Among themselves, therefore, they were free to employ Hebrew dates.

Now conditions are different. Jews mingle freely with their neighbors in schools, shops, offices, theatres, and in every walk of life. And since the civil calendar is in general use, Jews must of necessity do the same. We could hardly imagine a Jewish business man dating bills and letters with Hebrew dates. Even in Palestine, the general calendar is used for all practical purposes.

The Jewish calendar, therefore, serves mainly as a guide in our religious and folk life, in celebrating the holidays and festivals, and in observing the Yahrzeit or death anniversary. As such it will remain as long as the holidays and ceremonies are observed by the Jewish people.

In many homes the Jewish calendar serves as an object of decoration, beautifying the home and making it distinctly Jewish. Some of the calendars are beautifully illustrated. In Palestine, a calendar is published which depicts scenes and events of the previous year. In America, organizations as well as business houses are beginning to issue calendars with color reproductions from the works of Jewish artists.

PLANS FOR A NEW CALENDAR

Many people are dissatisfied with the present civil or general calendar. Business men find fault with it because the months vary in length. They cannot compare the business of one month with that of another. Moreover, the four quarters of the year do not have the same number of days. Employers are often annoyed because there are five pay days for their employees in some months. Research work-

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ers are also often inconvenienced by the fact that they cannot compare monthly records easily. These people want a calendar which will do away with all these inconveniences.

A committee appointed by the League of Nations in 1923 has been considering many plans for changing the calendar. One of the plans, submitted by an American, appears to be most popular. According to this plan, the year would have thirteen months of 28 days each, or 52 weeks, as at present. The year, on January first, would always begin on Sunday. The extra day in regular years, and the extra two days in leap years would be declared holidays and would not be counted. If this plan were adopted, the year would begin on Sunday and would end after 364 days on Saturday. The following day would be a holiday, and the civil New Year would be celebrated the day after. Monday, then would become Sunday. The Saturday of that week would fall on the day we now call Sunday. On leap years, Sunday would be moved ahead two days.

Since all months would have an equal number of days and would all begin on Sunday and end after 28 days on Saturday, there would be no need of printing new calendars each year, and dates could be figured out without consulting a calendar. We would soon learn that the tenth of each month always comes on Tuesday, and so with each day of the month.

Why Jews Are Opposed to the Plan

What would happen to the Sabbath? It, too, would move ahead continuously. The first year after the plan is adopted, the Sabbath would come on Sunday. If it happened to be a leap year, Sabbath would be on Monday. The second year, it would have to be observed on Tuesday, the fourth

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on Wednesday, and so on. Jews naturally are opposed to this plan or to any plan which would keep shifting the Sabbath. Jews rest on the seventh day because the Bible tells that the world was created in six days, and God rested on the seventh. To move it to Sunday or any other day would be contrary to Jewish tradition. Various Jewish organizations have been working to prevent the adoption of a plan which would dislocate the Sabbath from year to year.

To conclude, the story of the Jewish calendar takes us back to the earliest history of our people. At first there was no calendar, as was true of all races at that time. Later on, a simple time-guide, based on the movements of the sun, moon and earth, was invented. It was an oral calendar; Rosh Hodesh, the holidays and the other important dates were announced orally and made known by fire signals. As time went on, it became desirable to have a fixed calendar. The people now knew enough about astronomy to make definite rules and figure out dates ahead of time. The dispersion of the Jewish people made necessary a definite, written time-guide.

The Jewish calendar we use today is the one written down by Hillel the Second some sixteen hundred years ago. We are dependent on it for our holidays and personal ceremonies, therefore, it is an important object in every Jewish home and in every Jewish institution.



Chapter Nine

THE SYNAGOGUE

PRAYER is the word that comes to our mind when synagogue is mentioned. But the synagogue is more than a house of worship. It is also a place of study and a community center. In fact, we have good reason to believe that it began as a place of study and only later began to serve also as a house of prayer, and still later as a community center.

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Today it ministers to all these three needs. And because it serves the purposes of religion, education and social life, the synagogue is a most important institution in the life of the Jewish people. Many claim it to be the most important of all.

BEFORE TEMPLE DAYS

The Jews lived without synagogues for many centuries. They always had places of worship, of course, but not at all like synagogues. Abraham, you will recall, "buildest an altar unto the Lord." Isaac, too, "buildest an altar." Jacob, to show his awe of God after the dream at Bethel, "took the stone that he had put under his head, and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on top of it." These are the earliest places of worship used by Jews that we know about. They served for private rather than public worship.

In the days of Moses, while they were wandering in the desert, the Hebrews carried with them a large beautiful tent called MISHKAN OHEL MOED or Tabernacle. Whenever they camped, this sanctuary was erected and served as a house of worship. In the center of the sacred tent stood the altar, upon which the sacrifices were offered. There were other holy objects in the sanctuary, among them the Ark with the Two Tablets of the Law and the seven-branched Menorah. The Mishkan was the first place of public worship which Jews possessed. It also served as "a tent of meeting" where Moses taught the people the laws they had received, and where he answered questions and passed judgments.

Sanctuaries and High Places

When the Jews settled in Palestine, in the times of Joshua and the Judges, the one sacred object which commanded

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the reverence of all the tribes was the Ark with the Two Tablets of the Law. Wherever the Ark was kept, it seems, there the chief sanctuary was located. It finally found a permanent home in Shiloh, which served as the main place of worship until the Temple in Jerusalem was built. Here people came to offer sacrifices and prayers. Samuel's father, Elkanah, pilgrimaged annually to celebrate the harvest festival there. His wife, Hannah, accompanied him to pray for a son. There the girls from the tribe of Ephraim gathered to dance and sing on the festival we know today as Succot. In Shiloh resided the priest who was also a judge, to whom people came for advice and for the settlement of disputes. Leaders of the tribes probably assembled there to discuss mutual needs and problems.

But worship in those days was not limited to Shiloh. All over the country were BAMOT, High Places, which served nearby villages and towns. The people gathered at these shrines on festivals to offer sacrifices and to celebrate. This practice was adopted from the Canaanites and other peoples whom the Hebrews found in Palestine. Often the ceremonies resembled more the forms of worship to Baal than to Jehovah, the national God of Israel. Nor did the simple folk differentiate between the two. Later on, the prophets fought against these local shrines, claiming that they led to Baal worship and to lack of unity among the Hebrew tribes. Only after many centuries of continuous teaching by the prophets were these BAMOT finally eradicated.

THE FIRST TEMPLE

The Shiloh sanctuary was at last replaced by the Temple in Jerusalem. David was the one to conceive the idea but

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Solomon carried it out. The Temple or BET HAMIKDASH marked a great advance in the history of the people, both in their religious life and national strength. It became the center of worship for the whole nation. There daily sacrifices were made on behalf of all, and individuals could come with offerings of thanksgiving. During festivals the Temple brought together farmers and townsmen from all regions of the country and made them feel that they were part of one nation.

The role of the Temple at Jerusalem is beautifully expressed in Solomon's prayer at the dedication ceremony of the First Temple. It was intended not only for the Jews of Palestine but also for the strangers in the land and for all mankind.

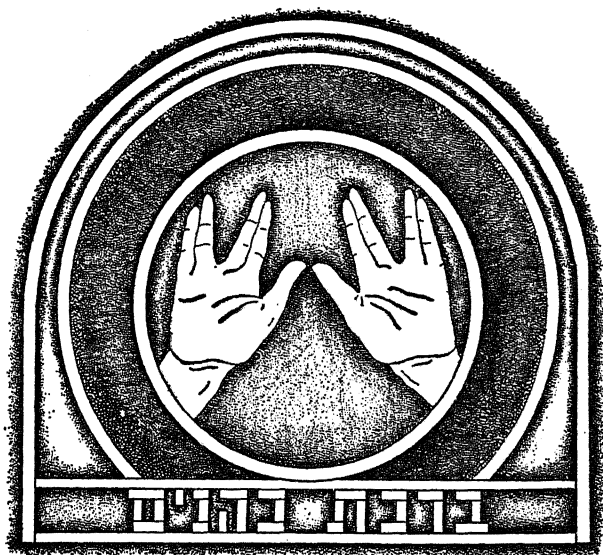
Moreover concerning a stranger that is not of Thy people Israel, but cometh out of a far country for Thy name's sake—for they shall hear of Thy great name, and of Thy strong hand, and of Thy stretched-out arm—when he shall come and pray toward this house; hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling-place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to Thee for: that all people of the earth may know Thy name, to fear Thee, as do Thy people Israel; and that they may know that this house, which I have builded is called by Thy name.

First Kings, VIII, 41-43

Temple Ritual

Sacrifice was the chief form of worship in the Temple. There were animal and grain sacrifices. Incense was burned. During the sacrificial ceremonies, conducted by the KOHAN-IM or priests, the Levites chanted hymns and played on

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harps, lutes, cymbals, trumpets and other musical instruments. Sacrifices took place daily, but on the Sabbath, on ROSH HODESH and on the festivals there were additional offerings and ceremonies. Especially impressive was the Temple ritual on Pesach, Shavuot, and Succot, the three pilgrimage festivals and on Yom Kippur. The Temple was maintained by the annual SHEKEL tax* and from the sacrifices and offerings brought by the people. The High Priest was the chief officer in charge of the ritual and responsible for the Temple's upkeep.

So important had the Temple become that when the nation split into two kingdoms after the death of Solomon,

* The Shekel was a unit of money in ancient Palestine. A tax of a half-shekel was paid annually by all male adults to maintain the public services of the Temple.

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Jeroboam set up two new centers of worship for the northern kingdom. "Now will the kingdom return to the house of David", Jeroboam said, "if the people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem." These places of worship, however, did not play an important role in the life of the people. Many northerners must have continued to look to the Temple in Jerusalem as the one sacred shrine of the country.

The BAMOT and other local sanctuaries, however, continued to exist, even though the prophets carried on a continuous fight against them. The Temple was too distant for the majority of the population. Even on the harvest festivals not everybody could travel so far. Knowing of no other way to worship than by sacrifices, they continued to maintain "high places" in various parts of the country. Two of the most able kings, Hezekiah and Josiah, made a real effort to eradicate these shrines. Hezekiah was only partly successful; Josiah much more so.

BEGINNINGS OF THE SYNAGOGUE

For many centuries, then, the synagogue was unknown. It was in Babylon, at the time of the exile some twenty-five hundred years ago, that the institution is believed to have been born. The Jews who were exiled from Palestine and settled in Babylon were unable to continue their religious life as before. Raised with the belief that the Temple could be built only in Jerusalem, and that only there may sacrifices be offered, the exiles were indeed perplexed. Neither would they go back to the primitive BAMOT. What were they to do?

New ideas develop slowly, and so it was with the syna-

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gogue idea. No one said "come and let us organize a synagogue." But things happened which gradually led to the birth of a new institution which proved of vital importance to the Jewish people as well as to Christians and Moslems. For the synagogue is one of the great contributions the Jews gave to the world.

Informal Gatherings

The captive Jews in Babylon were very unhappy. They longed for their homeland, for the beautiful Temple, and for national independence. On Sabbaths and festivals they would gather in the homes of their prophets and other leaders to remember past glories and dream together of a golden future. They recalled the Temple ceremonies and chanted the psalms the Levites had sung and played. The learned among them would open a scroll and read a chapter or two of the sacred writings, explaining difficult passages. If the prophet was present, he would speak of them. Ezekiel's home was evidently the chief gathering place on these occasions.

These informal gatherings in Babylon were evidently the beginnings of the synagogue. More than that, by serving the purposes of fellowship, of study, and of prayer, they indicated the nature of the future institution.

Why the Idea Lived On

One would think that after the nation was restored in Palestine and the Temple at Jerusalem rebuilt, there would be no need for such gatherings and the synagogue idea would die at birth. It certainly was not necessary for worship because the new Temple served that purpose. Fellowship, too, could be secured in other ways. If the idea re-

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mained and spread far and wide it was chiefly due to the third purpose, namely, study. During the period of exile, the Jews learned what great treasures they had in their books of law and in the writings of their prophets. Moreover, they realized that unless the people studied the laws and prophecies and knew their contents well, they could not exist and the Jewish religion would remain the private possession of a few prophets and learned men.

The synagogue idea, therefore, took root and branched out, not all at once, of course, but in the course of several centuries. At the time the Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans there were synagogues in every city and town of Palestine. In Jerusalem alone they counted close to five hundred. Synagogues were also found throughout the diaspora — in Babylon, Egypt, Rome and other countries where there were enough Jews to maintain one. Josephus mentions a synagogue in Alexandria with a capacity of 30,000. To the Jews in foreign countries, the synagogue was vitally necessary because they had no other way of worshiping. Temples you will remember were forbidden outside of Jerusalem.*

Role of the Temple

The chief house of worship, however, was the Temple at Jerusalem. There sacrifices were offered daily on behalf of the whole nation. On the Sabbath, on Rosh Hodesh, and on the holidays impressive ceremonies were held in accordance with the spirit of each occasion. The Temple ritual was particularly solemn on Yom Kippur and Succot. At these ceremonies, the Levites sang psalms and played on in-

* Only the Jews of Egypt dared break this prohibition and built themselves a Temple at Liontopolis which existed for about a century.

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struments. Many of the hymns were sung by the thousands of people in the Temple courts. On certain occasions, appropriate selections from sacred writings were read. As in the First Temple so in the Second, the priests performed the ritual, with the High Priest as the chief religious officer. The Temple at Jerusalem was the great symbol of unity and was visited and supported by the Jews of Palestine as well as by our people from all parts of the world. The fact that the Sanhedrin sat in the Temple added greatly to its prestige.*

Study and Prayer in the Synagogue

Study and prayer were the two functions of the synagogue in the days of the Second Temple, although to Jews outside of Palestine it probably served also as a community house. The service was composed of the *SHEMA* prayers and of the *SHMONEH ESREH* or Eighteen Benedictions. There were also prayers describing the sacrifices in the Temple. On solemn occasions, the priests blessed the people. Study consisted of lessons from the Bible and of sermons. Many synagogues conducted schools.

On festivals, selections from the Pentateuch and Prophets related to these occasions were read and explained. On Sabbaths, the readings were at first chosen at random. Later on, the Five Books of Moses were divided into sections or *SIDROT* in such a way as to cover them all within a definite period of time. In those communities where Aramaic and other languages were spoken by Jews, the scriptural readings were translated aloud. This led to the translation of the

* The Sanhedrin was the legislative body, the supreme court, and the national university in one.

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whole Bible into Aramaic,* and later into Greek and Latin.

Building and Officers

Synagogue buildings varied in size and splendor. Rich communities spared no expense to erect fine structures. In recent years, several synagogues of this period have been unearthed. Floors were laid out in beautiful mosaics depicting Jewish symbols like the Menorah and the Shofar. The main articles of furniture were the Ark, where the scrolls were kept, the Bimah or platform, with a reading desk for the scrolls, and the Menorah.

The two chief officers of the ancient synagogue were the GABBAI who was chosen from among the elders, and a HAZAN whose duties were similar to the modern Shamash or sexton. Occasionally the HAZAN acted as reader and preacher. Generally, however, these were performed by the SOPHERIM or Scribes who constituted the learned class at the time. There were no paid rabbis as today. The term rabbi was an honorary title given to distinguished scholars and teachers.

NEW ROLE OF THE SYNAGOGUE

After the Temple was destroyed by the Romans, the synagogue took its place as the one house of worship, and its importance in the life of the people greatly increased. Many of the Temple ceremonies were transferred to the synagogue but in a modified form, of course, and without sacrifices, since they were forbidden anywhere but in the Temple at Jerusalem. On Succot, for example, the procession,

* The Aramaic translation, usually found in the Hebrew Humash, is called *Targum*, which means translation.

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with the Lulav and Etrog, was directed around the Bimah. On Yom Kippur, a description of the famous Avodah ceremony was included in the ritual. To the original service of the Shema and Shmoneh Esreh prayers many new selections and hymns were added in the course of time.

Interestingly enough, the control of synagogues remained in the same hands as before. While in the Temple the priests and Levites officiated, scribes, teachers and laymen were at the helm in the synagogue. This proved quite important for the future of the synagogue, serving to retain its democratic character as an institution in which all Jews could participate.

Synagogue, Church and Mosque

During these centuries, the church and mosque came into existence as outgrowths of the synagogue. Jesus and the other first Christians were Jews and worshiped in synagogues. Subsequently to their breaking away from Judaism, they did not invent a new way of religious worship but continued the Jewish type of service, consisting of prayer, reading from the scriptures, and sermons. In time, many changes were introduced, of course, and different ceremonies were developed by Christianity. The Moslems, too, borrowed the synagogue idea from the Jews, for Judaism has been also the mother of Mohammedanism. Praying, reading the Koran, and sermons by learned men constitute the manner of worship in the mosque. The synagogue, then, is one of the great contributions given by the Jews to the world.

As was to be expected, the synagogue slowly but steadily grew in importance. But not until several hundred years had passed did it become the principal institution in Jewish life. Among Babylonian Jewry, which after the decline of

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Palestine became the largest and strongest Jewry in the world, the Yeshivot or Academies rather than the synagogues occupied the first place. These Yeshivot were seats of learning as well as courts of law. Jews from all over the known world looked to these Academies for guidance and inspiration, as they had depended on the Temple and the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. There they sent their best students for advanced studies, and in addition they helped support these Academies. In Spain, too, which succeeded Babylon as the country with the largest and strongest Jewry, the Academies and universities played the leading role in the life of the Jewish people.

Synagogue and Community

Gradually, the synagogue reached its destined role as the chief institution in the Jewish community. This was especially true in Germany, Italy and other countries where Jews lived in ghettos. Up to this time the synagogue had served mainly as a house of study and prayer. It began also to assume the new function of community center. Now it was known under three names: BET HATEFILAH or House of Worship, BET HAMIDRASH or House of Study, and BET HAKNESET or House of Assembly. Perhaps it rose to so prominent a position because the synagogue provided the Jewish community with its three chief needs — religion, study, and fellowship.

During the Middle Ages, Jews lived in ghettos, which were often compulsory, and which were surrounded by high walls like a prison. Many, such as those in Poland, were voluntary. Jews preferred to live close together because they felt safer, and could observe their various customs without interference. The synagogue building stood

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in the center of the ghetto and was easily reached by all. Large communities, of course, had more than one synagogue. Since there were practically no other community buildings, the synagogue served as the one place for religious services, for study and discussion, and for celebrations and meetings.

Bet Hatefilah

As a house of prayer the synagogue grew to such importance because Jews tended more and more to emphasize public worship. Perhaps they felt greater confidence in the effects of their prayers when chanted in the company of fellow Jews. Since the synagogue was so close to the home, only an unexpected occurrence would prevent one man from going daily for morning, afternoon and evening services. A place becomes a second home when visited so frequently and so regularly. On Sabbaths and holidays, practically half the days were spent in the synagogue.

Bet Hamidrash

In earlier days, study in the synagogue consisted of reading the Bible and of sermons, as part of the service. This continued through the centuries. But in time new forms of study developed. Before and after the service, every morning and afternoon, groups of men gathered to study the Bible or Talmud. They proceeded systematically, taking one book at a time and completing the chapters in order day by day. On Sabbath and holiday afternoons, the community rabbi would speak. Occasionally itinerant preachers delivered lectures. More rarely, a Meshulah or messenger from Palestine would tell them of the Holy Land. Very few Jews, whether learned or not, missed any of these sessions if they

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could only spare the time, and usually they managed to find time.

Study continued day and night, for the synagogue usually housed the school for children or Heder, and the high school and college or Yeshivah. School hours were long, from early morning until late in the evening. There the children also played between lessons. Many of the boys of the ghetto virtually grew up in the synagogue.

Bet Hakneset

Because of their devotion to religion and their love of learning, the synagogue was a "second home" to young and old. Add to this the fact that it was also a community house and it can be realized how important a role it has played in the life of our people. As a community house it was the place for parties and celebrations; for town meetings; for collection and distribution of charity; a shelter house for travelers, students and beggars; a courthouse where trials took place and disputes were settled; a clubhouse where friends met for conversation; a library for reading and study. The officers of the synagogue, who were also the leaders of the community, looked after all civic needs.

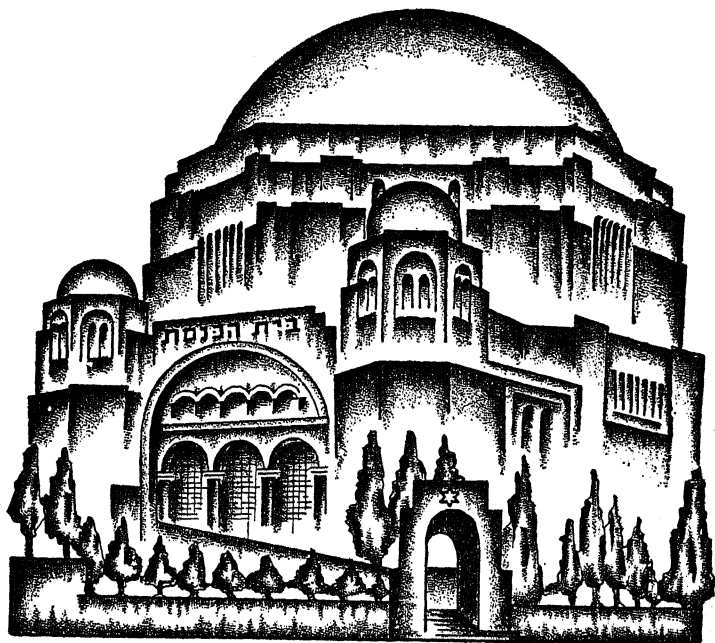
People were extremely poor, houses small and crowded. For immediate family gatherings they had enough room. But when guests were invited the synagogue was the only place to accommodate them. Family celebrations like Brit Milah, Pidyon Haben, Ben Torah, Bar Mitzvah and weddings, therefore, most always were held in the synagogue.

The synagogue has been fashioned by our forefathers during the past centuries in order to preserve a distinct way of life in accordance with the beliefs and ideals of the Jewish

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people. It arose, in ancient times, as a result of the quest for knowledge, of the Jew's determination to make Torah the basis of Jewish life, and also to supplement the Temple at Jerusalem for the purpose of worship. After the destruction of the Temple, the synagogue became the sole institution for holding public worship, at the same time developing further as a house of learning. In the course of centuries it assumed also the role of a community center for cultural, social and philanthropic activities.

The synagogue is one of the great contributions of the Jewish people. "In all their long history, they have scarcely done anything more remarkable than to create the synagogue. No human institution has a longer continuous history, and none has done more for the uplifting of the human race." (Herford)



Chapter Ten

THE SYNAGOGUE TODAY

THE synagogue has come down to us as part and parcel of our Jewish heritage. It was born, some twenty-five hundred years ago, out of the necessity of the Jewish exiles in Babylon to study and worship together. It continued after they returned to Palestine because Torah and prayer became so vital to our ancestors. Even though the Temple at Jerusalem was rebuilt, synagogues arose in every town and village. When the Temple was burned down and the Jewish State destroyed by the Romans, prayer took its place as the sole

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form of worship, and the need for synagogues, therefore, increased. After more centuries had rolled by, it emerged as the central institution of every Jewish community, large or small. How much devotion, thought and energy have been spent on the synagogue during all these centuries! What an important force it has been for keeping alive the spirit of the Jew and for enriching his faith and culture!

Today the synagogue occupies a leading place in Jewish life. Wherever Jews live, there synagogues exist. New York City, with its close to two million Jews, has hundreds of synagogues and temples. We can hardly imagine Judaism without its synagogues. The great majority of American Jews look to the synagogue for worship and study, for meetings and celebrations, and for participation in communal activities. Special colleges are maintained to train rabbis as the spiritual leaders of synagogues and temples. Millions of dollars are spent annually for conducting and maintaining these institutions.

Most modern synagogues are different, of course, from those of past generations. Many changes have taken place in Jewish life in these times, and the synagogue, too, has changed. We have several types of synagogues, differing from each other in kind of service rendered, in appearance, and in other respects. But with all the difference, every orthodox shuhl, conservative synagogue and reform temple hold fast to three traditional purposes: worship, study, and fellowship.

SYNAGOGUE OBJECTS AND DECORATIONS

The objects found in the modern synagogue are the same as those of past generations: namely, the Holy Ark, the

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Scrolls of the Torah, the Ner Tamid, the Menorah, the Bimah and the Almemar. Present-day institutions, however, have decorations which were not permitted in the past. The organ is also a recent innovation.

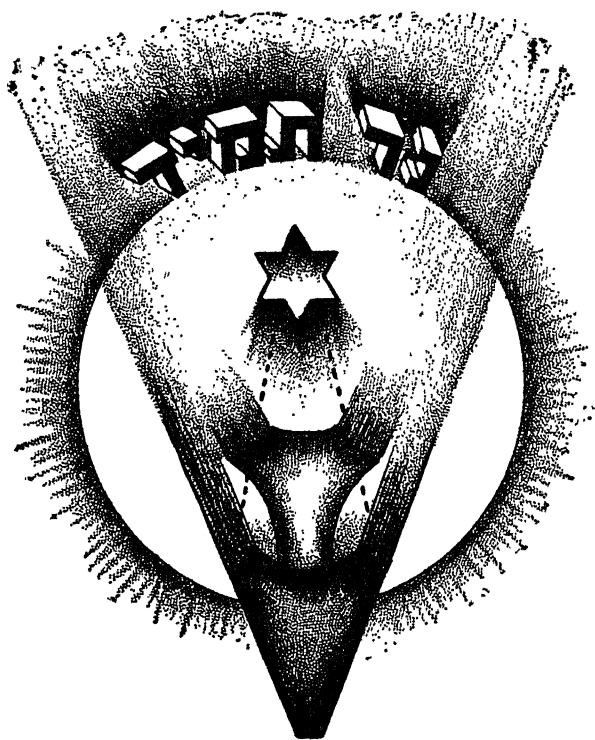
Most prominent of synagogue objects is the Aron Kodesh or Holy Ark. It dates back to the Ark of the portable sanctuary of the desert in which the Two Tablets of Law were kept. Today the Ark contains the Sefer Torahs or Scrolls of the Law. In America, the Aron Kodesh is always built into the eastern wall — towards Palestine. In other countries, too, it is always so placed that the congregation will be facing Zionward. Over the sliding doors of the Ark hangs a curtain called Parochet, embroidered with Hebrew letters and Jewish designs. The Aron Kodesh often has beautiful carvings.

The Sefer Torahs are of parchment. Each scroll contains the Five Books of Moses, written by hand in decorative Hebrew letters. The sticks on which the parchment is rolled are called Etz Hayims, Trees of Life. Each scroll is covered with an embroidered mantle for beauty and preservation. Over the mantel are hung a shield or breast plate, and a pointer or Yad which is used to indicate the place when reading, since it is forbidden to touch the inside of the scroll with the bare finger. On festive occasions small golden crowns, with little bells attached, are mounted on the Etz Hayims.

Designs and Decorations

The favorite decorations on the breastplate, mantle, Parochet and Ark are designs of lions and crowns, of the Two Tablets, and of the Magen David. The lion represents the

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tribe of Judah and is a symbol of strength. The crown symbolizes the kingship of God. The Magen David, or Shield of David, is the best known Jewish design and one of the oldest. It is so called because according to tradition King David's shield was in the shape of a six-pointed star.

In front and over the Aron Kodesh hangs the Ner Tamid or Perpetual Light, as in the ancient sanctuary the golden Menorah stood in front of the Ark containing the Ten Com-

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mandments. The Ner Tamid symbolizes the faith of the Jew that Israel and Judaism will live on forever, and that the Torah shall always be a guiding light to mankind.

The pulpit, or Bimah, in most American synagogues, is placed in front. Formerly it was in the center of the auditorium, as it is today in most synagogues of other countries as well as in some orthodox institutions in America. The reading desk or Almemar on which the Torah scroll is unrolled, also dates back to the ancient synagogues. On either side of the Almemar usually stand seven-branched Menorahs.

Stained windows with designs, pictorial representations and Hebrew lettering add much to the beauty and atmosphere of the synagogue. These are, however, a comparatively recent innovation. Besides the stained windows and the decorations mentioned previously, no other pictures or art objects are to be found in most synagogues. There are no paintings, statues or carvings as in churches. This is most likely due to the prohibition in the Bible against pictures and graven images.*

Another innovation is the organ, found in all Reform temples and in a few Conservative synagogues. Orthodox Jews are opposed to the organ and other musical instruments because their use in the synagogue on the Sabbath and holidays is forbidden by rabbinic law as a token of mourning over the destruction of the Temple where the Levites played on musical instruments. Another difference between Orthodox and other houses of worship is the separate balcony or section for women. This began in the an-

* Many of the ancient synagogues, we know now from recent excavations in Palestine, did have mosaic designs and pictures and also carvings of Menorahs and other sacred objects and of traditional Jewish symbols.

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cient Temple, where the women were allowed only in the special court reserved for them.

Synagogue Buildings

In building synagogues, Jews have always paid attention to their appearance. The synagogues recently unearthed were beautiful structures. Some of the very old houses of prayer still standing in European cities are most impressive buildings. In America, many of the new synagogues and temples are a source of pride to the Jewish community because of their architectural beauty. A few, however, look more like Greek and Roman rather than Jewish buildings. In Palestine, practically every synagogue has a large Hanukkah Menorah mounted on the roof, which is lit during the week of the festival.

DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

Because all Jews do not hold the same religious beliefs, we have today three kinds of synagogues: Orthodox, Conservative and Reform. The Orthodox institution is usually referred to as a SHUHL, the Conservative as a synagogue, and the Reform as a temple. The temples of Reform Jews, belonging usually to the wealthier class, are more imposing in appearance and have better accommodations; Orthodox Jews hail from the poorer class and their shuhls therefore are least impressive. Conservative synagogues are for the middle class. There are exceptions of course. Some Orthodox and Conservative buildings are more beautiful and spacious than many a Reform temple.

Far more important are the differences in the services. In Orthodox synagogues men and women sit separately, as in

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former generations. The prayers are those handed down from the past and are recited completely in Hebrew. All men wear the Tallit or prayer shawl. In Conservative synagogues, men and women sit together. The service is orthodox but many prayers are read in English. The Tallit is worn by the men. The Reform ritual differs radically from the other two. The service, which is much shorter, is largely in English, and includes prayers, the wording of which has been changed. There is usually no Hazan, the service being conducted by the rabbi, assisted by a mixed choir. Neither the rabbi nor the other men in the congregation wear the traditional Tallit. Men and women sit together, and the men wear no hats. The organ is played at the services. In Orthodox and Conservative synagogues, the traditional Hebrew melodies are sung exclusively while in Reform temples they are not as noticeable.

Of course, there are exceptions. In some Orthodox shuhls, prayers are occasionally translated into English. Several Reform temples have Hazanim, while a number of Conservative synagogues permit organ playing and mixed choirs.

These variations in services grow out of differences in religious beliefs. The Orthodox, as the word implies, are the most traditional, insisting that the customs and practices of the past should be strictly observed. The Reform Jews are at the other extreme, claiming that only those traditions should be retained which Jews of this generation believe necessary and fitting. The Conservatives cling to tradition but believe that certain changes are necessary in modern times.

Far more important are the similarities between the three groups. The sacred objects are found in practically every Jewish house of worship. The most important prayers, like

the Shema and the Kaddish, are included in all three liturgies. Reading from the Torah, and the rabbi's sermon, are part of each of the three services. Of late, the differences between Orthodox, Reform and Conservative have become less marked.

The Rabbi

There is another similarity between all Jewish houses of worship in America, namely, that practically each has a rabbi of its own. In ancient times, the term rabbi had another meaning. The famous Akiba ben Joseph, for example, was known as rabbi because of his learning, though he was not engaged to serve a synagogue. It was an honorary degree or title. Even a century ago, a rabbi was not usually assigned to serve one institution. Today, practically every synagogue has a spiritual leader who is called Rav or Rabbi, and upon whom the success of the institution is largely dependent. Every modern rabbi, of course, is also concerned with the welfare of the whole Jewish community and takes part in many activities outside of his place of worship.

The old synagogue was a place of worship, of study and of fellowship. To what extent does the modern synagogue serve religion, education and community life? Think of the synagogues you know — Conservative, Reform or Orthodox — bearing in mind the description of how the three-fold purpose was carried out in past generations, as described in the preceding chapter.

Synagogue as Bet Hatefilah

As a house of prayer, every synagogue today furthers religion. In Orthodox and Conservative institutions services

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are held three times a day throughout the year. Reform temples conduct services only on the Sabbath and Holidays, and a few on Sunday mornings. On the Sabbath, the attendance is much larger, of course, especially on Friday nights in Reform and Conservative synagogues and on Saturday mornings in Orthodox shuhls. Festivals, too, find the synagogues well patronized. Only on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, however, are all synagogues filled to capacity. If all American Jews decided to attend their respective places of worship regularly, probably five times as many buildings as we have today would be needed.

Synagogue as Bet Hamidrash

What about learning in the modern synagogue? Are portions of the Bible read at services? Does the rabbi deliver sermons? Are there study groups? Are schools conducted by synagogues and temples? The answer to the first two questions is "yes" for all institutions. Study groups, too, exist in the three types. But here differences are noticeable. In Orthodox congregations, older Jews often remain after the Min-hah service to study the Bible and Talmud. There are also special groups known as Hevrah Shas or Talmud Society. Such study groups exist in Conservative synagogues, too. But Conservative, Reform as well as modern Orthodox congregations conduct, in addition, forums, lectures, classes and other Jewish study activities.

Modern institutions further promote Jewish education by maintaining schools for children. Every Conservative congregation has a daily Hebrew school or a religious school on Sundays, or both. All Reform temples house Sunday schools, while a few also have weekday classes. Orthodox congregations usually depend on the neighborhood Talmud

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Torahs and Yeshivot to give their children a Jewish education, so that very few conduct schools of their own.

The modern synagogue, then, is a Bet Hamidrash too. But how well does it fulfill the purpose of Jewish education? All synagogues are not alike in this respect, of course. How good a Bet Hamidrash any one synagogue is depends on the answers to questions such as the following: How many children, youth and adults are benefiting from the schools and study groups? Does the institution have good teachers and adequate accommodations? Is it possible to give a thorough Jewish education in a one-day-a-week school? Is the amount spent on education sufficient? Does the synagogue cooperate with other synagogues and Jewish schools in the cause of Jewish education?

Synagogue as a Community House

As a community house the modern synagogue differs in many respects from its predecessor. It is no longer a shelter for travelers, students and beggars, for today these needs are provided in other ways. Neither are legal matters announced or settled in the synagogue, although the rabbi is often called upon to act as peacemaker, and to pass on matters of Jewish ritual law. The task of collecting and distributing charity has been taken over by the Federation and other welfare agencies. The synagogue, however, is called to help raise funds among its members. Every congregation has a small fund for unexpected or urgent charitable needs. Family celebrations like Brit Milah, Pidyon Haben and Bar Mitzvah usually take place in the home today. Weddings, too, are not held in synagogues as frequently as in the past.

On the other hand, the modern synagogue has become the center for many new recreational and communal activi-

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ties. Every Conservative and Reform congregation has clubs for children and youth, women's societies, and men's organizations. Plays and concerts are presented in the auditorium. Occasionally, Jewish art exhibits are arranged. A number of synagogues have gymnasiums and even swimming pools. Festivals are celebrated with large entertainments. Pesach is the time for a public Seder, Purim for a carnival or mask-ball, Hanukah for plays, and Shavuot for confirmation receptions. Many a synagogue today is truly a Jewish community center.

Synagogue and Community

Synagogue and community were one before modern times. There were no other Jewish institutions besides synagogues and schools. The officers of the synagogue, were the leaders of the whole community. The rabbi was engaged to serve everyone rather than a particular congregation. All the religious, educational, charitable and civic affairs were centered in the synagogue. The money for its maintenance, naturally, was obtained from the whole community instead of from a special membership.

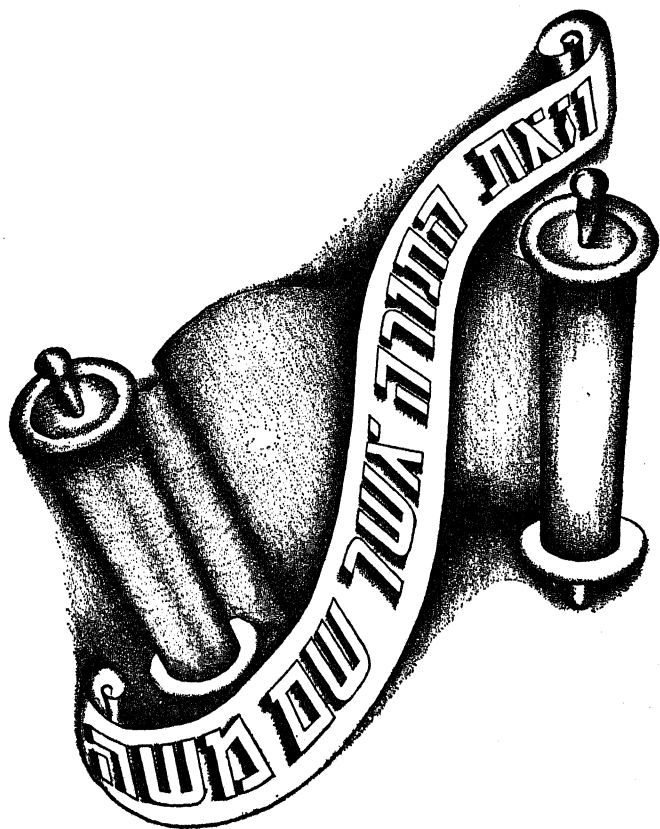
Today it is one of many agencies serving Jewish group life. Alongside the synagogue, we have schools, recreational centers, social service bureaus, welfare organizations, courts of arbitration, Federations, and many other communal bodies looking after Jewish necessities. Each synagogue exists primarily for its members and their families. The rabbi is expected to devote his time chiefly to one institution. Maintenance of the synagogue depends on the dues paid by its own members and on special contributions by those who have the means.

The modern synagogue, nevertheless, is an integral part

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of the Jewish community. It is the one institution which furthers the Jewish religion. It also works for Jewish education and serves as a community center. In addition, it shares in general responsibilities of communal life. When funds have to be raised, synagogues are among the first to make appeals among their members, and to provide workers for campaign committees. Should anti-Semitism raise its ugly head in the city, congregations help suppress the danger. If a Jewish community council is formed synagogues send representatives to its meetings. Many of the Jews who belong to synagogues are active members in the Federation, in Zionist organizations, in the Bnai Brith, and in various social, cultural and philanthropic projects.

The synagogue has been part of Jewish life for some twenty-five hundred years. In fact, it is difficult to imagine that there was a time when Jews had no synagogue, just as we can hardly conceive Judaism today without it. The synagogue is, moreover, one of Israel's great contributions to mankind, for both the Christian church and the Moham-medan mosque were modeled after the Jewish synagogue. To our people, it has been as indispensable as is the nucleus of the protoplasm to the living cell. Destroy the nucleus and the cell dies. Today, too, the synagogue is an important center of Jewish religion, of Jewish education, and of Jewish community life.



Chapter Eleven

PRAYER AND WORSHIP

As a religious people, the Jews have sought to express in worship and prayer their most cherished beliefs, their fondest aspirations, their deepest sorrows and joys, and, above all, their abiding faith in God. Through worship, they

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strove to sanctify life and to imbue themselves with love and goodness. Prayer, therefore, has been a daily Mitzvah to Jews for countless generations. At all times, they looked upon prayer as a bond uniting them with members of their race in every part of the world, and as an act of loyalty to Israel and its heritage.

Indeed, the Jews were the first people to worship without sacrifices and gifts to God, to set aside regular hours for prayer, and to designate specific prayers not only for the Sabbath and holidays but for every day of the week. Special prayerbooks, containing services and selections for every occasion, were composed in the course of time. Laws and customs arose governing individual and public worship. A prayer shawl, phylacteries and other articles of ritual were adopted. Even more important, a special institution, the synagogue, came into being partly out of the urge to worship together with fellow men.

FROM SACRIFICES TO PRAYERS

There probably never was a time when Jews did not pray. Abraham prayed that God spare the cities of Sodom and Gamorrah. Jacob prayed before the meeting with Esau when he returned to Palestine. Moses prayed on behalf of the Israelites after they had made the golden calf, and on other occasions. David petitioned God for the privilege of building the Temple at Jerusalem. Throughout the early books of the Bible, we find many prayers of an individual character.

For many centuries, however, sacrifices rather than prayers were considered the highest form of worship. This was true before the erection of Solomon's Temple at Jerusalem,

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as well as during the existence of the First and Second Temples. Our ancestors believed that God would be pleased most with sacrifices of animals, fowl or cereals. The sacrificial ceremony was to them an act of homage to God and of thankfulness for His bounties. There were sacrifices offered by the priests on behalf of the whole nation, and they were also brought by individuals to express thankfulness, or remorse, or for some other personal reason. The prophets and sages taught the people that worship was acceptable only if it inspired righteous living.

The sacrificial rites in the Temple were accompanied by the chanting of prayers and hymns and by instrumental music, which lent beauty and awe to the ceremonies. However, the sacrifice was the important element of the worship, the prayers only an accompaniment. Outside of the central sanctuary, no regular worship was expected in ancient days, although people naturally could and did pray privately.

Role of the Synagogue

It was in Babylon, at the time of the first exile, that Jews began to depend on prayer as the sole form of worship, for they could not bring themselves to erect a Temple anywhere but in Jerusalem, and sacrifices were permitted only in the one Temple. In Babylon, it is believed, Jews gathered to pray and study and thus the synagogue originated. When they returned to Palestine and the Temple was rebuilt, sacrifices were restored to their former place as the chief form of worship. But as the number of synagogues increased and Jews in ever greater numbers assembled in them on the Sabbath and holidays as well as daily, prayer became an accepted method of paying homage to God. In time a regular

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service, consisting of the Shema and the Shmoneh Esreh, developed.

With the destruction of the Second Temple, sacrifices ceased completely and prayer took its place as the one and only form of public worship. At first this was accepted as a matter of necessity, since sacrifices were allowed only in the Temple; but soon after, the rabbis concluded that prayer was preferable to sacrifice. This belief has been held by Jews ever since, although descriptions of the ancient sacrifices have been part of the traditional prayerbook to this day.

Importance of Public Worship

If the duty of worship had been an individual matter, perhaps prayer would not have become so significant. But Jews learned early in their history the value of public or communal worship. While yet in the desert, the ceremonies at the portable Mishkan or Tabernacle served to unite the tribes and to give them common ideals and hopes. The Temple at Jerusalem, over a period of a thousand years, imprinted this idea indelibly upon the minds of the Jews. On Pesach, Shavuot and Succot, when they gathered at Jerusalem from all sections of the country, everyone felt part of a unified nation and of one faith. They also discovered that worshiping together with fellow Jews gave each person more confidence in himself and in the effectiveness of his prayers. Moreover, the knowledge that a sacrifice was offered daily in the Temple on behalf of the whole country caused every man, woman and child to feel more secure and more hopeful.

With the rise of synagogues, public worship grew even more popular. The people enjoyed coming together for study and prayer in the synagogue. Unable to read, they

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welcomed the opportunity to have psalms and benedictions read to them, as they welcomed the lessons from the Torah and the prophetic writings taught by the scribes. The leaders, in turn, must have encouraged the people to assemble regularly for study and worship, since they were anxious to spread a knowledge of Judaism among the farmers and workers. Without such education, they realized, Israel could not survive, and Jewish faith and culture could not mean much to the people.

The need for public worship became much greater after the Jewish state was destroyed and the Jews dispersed over the known world. Jews felt the need of assembling together to pray for safety from enemies, to thank God when they were left in peace, and to petition the Almighty for a speedy return to Palestine. No less did they feel the necessity of meeting frequently and regularly to study the Torah, the prophetic books, and the other literary treasures. Prayer became a religious duty and an act of loyalty. A person was not considered a devoted Jew if he did not participate in public worship.

PRAYERS AND PRAYERBOOKS

As long as the Jews lived as a nation in Palestine, it did not seem necessary to make a record of the prayers, to compile prayerbooks, or to have a prescribed service. The Shema and the Shmoneh Esreh were the only regular prayers in the synagogue. The leader of the service was free to change the wording and to add selections of his own. The prayers were usually few and brief.

With the dispersion, arose the need of writing down the prayers and of specifying the occasions and hours for wor-

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ship. Unless all Jews followed the same services, the sense of unity among them would grow weaker. If each Jewish community did as it pleased in religious matters, there would soon develop many separate Jewries, strangers to one another. In order to survive without a country and government of their own, all Jews must be as one in their worship, beliefs, customs and aspirations.

Then, too, ignorance of the Hebrew language was increasing outside of Palestine. Diaspora Jewries could not be expected to transmit the Hebrew prayers from one generation to another without a knowledge of the language among the people. They firmly believed, of course, that public worship must be in Hebrew, so that the language of the prayers, as well as their contents, might serve as a bond uniting all Jews and as a symbol of loyalty to Israel.

Some of the learned men of the time were opposed to the recording of prayers. A person should worship in his own words when he feels like it, they argued. To this the majority answered that the average person is unable to express himself properly. How can an ignorant cobbler, for example, find the right words to describe the greatness of God and the beauties of nature? Very few are so educated as to understand thoroughly the ideals of the Jewish people. They must be provided with prayers composed by poets, prophets and scholars.

Regular Services

Public worship, the Jewish authorities decided, is to be held daily, on weekdays as well as on Sabbaths and holidays. Each day three services are to be held: SHAHARIT in the morning, MINHAH in the afternoon, and MAARIV in the evening. The SHAHARIT and MINHAH were in keeping with Tem-

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ple ritual where a morning and afternoon sacrifice was offered daily. The MAARIV or evening service was an innovation. Tradition has it that Abraham originated the morning service, Isaac the MINHAH, and Jacob the MAARIV.

Early Prayerbooks

The first prayers to be written down were the Shema and Shmoneh Esreh, which had been in common use during Second Temple days. To these, many new prayers were added constantly. In each generation, Jews found need to express their religious beliefs in new ways. Not only did the daily services continue to grow but special prayers were composed for the holidays. Unfortunately, copies of the early prayerbooks are no longer in existence. The earliest one extant is from the ninth century, compiled by Amram Gaon in Babylon. The second one to be discovered was composed by Saadyah Gaon, also of Babylon, a hundred years later. The best known of the early prayerbooks is called MAHZOR VITRI and was written by one of Rashi's disciples in the eleventh century.

Special Occasions for Prayer

Prayers were also composed for special occasions: for circumcision, Pidyon Haben, weddings, burial ceremonies; prayers upon waking in the morning and before retiring at night; grace after meals; midnight prayers or Hatzot; prayers when leaving on a journey and upon arrival; readings at a Hanukat Habayit or housewarming party; prayers upon being saved from danger; prayers for the sick and confessions for the dying; prayers when a tombstone is placed on a grave; memorial services for the dead. To these must be added the numerous Berachot or benedictions.

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Many Prayerbooks

These early prayerbooks, written by hand, differed greatly, with the exception of the Shema and the Shmoneh Esreh which were common to all. After the invention of printing, prayerbooks became more uniform. The Jews of Germany, Poland and nearby countries began to use the same version. The Jews of Spain printed their own services, which were somewhat different. Until recently, practically all prayerbooks were either the German-Polish version (Nusah Ashkenaz), or the Spanish version (Nusah Sefard). Descendants of Spanish Jews use the latter, while nearly all other Jews employ the former.

During the past century a new version or rather a new prayerbook known as the Union Prayerbook has been developed by Reform Jews, which, differs widely from the traditional books. It is much shorter, containing prayers which Reform Jews in America consider most valuable. All selections referring to the rebuilding of Palestine have been omitted. New prayers have been added and the wording in some of the old prayers changed. Most of the hymns and prayers are in English.

A traditional Jew who wants to be prepared for every occasion of worship will possess several rather than one prayerbook. He will have, first, the daily prayerbook called *Siddur*. In it he will also find the Sabbath and festival services, the Berachot, and the prayers for special occasions. For the High Holy Days, he will own a *Mahzor* which contains the special hymns for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.* He will also possess the *Kinot* or Book of Lamentations for the Fast of Av; *Selihot* or Prayers of Forgiveness

* There is also a special prayerbook for Pesach, Shavuot and Succot which is called *Mahzor*.

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for the days before Rosh Hashanah, and, of course a Psalter.

Prayers as Literature

Each of these is really a book of literature, or, more correctly, a book of religious poetry. Many of the prayers are from the Bible, the greatest literary work of all times. The psalms, for example, are considered by Jews and non-Jews as the finest religious poems ever written. Some prayers are from the Talmud, and they, too, are literary gems. The newer prayers were composed by such gifted Hebrew poets as Eliezar Kalir, Judah Halevi, Solomon ibn Gabirol and Abraham ibn Ezra. Throughout the centuries, Jews have produced famous poets who gave voice to the people's feeling and aspirations. To recite prayers is really to read beautiful literature. Jews have not tired repeating them day after day, year in and year out, because they enjoyed praying and were inspired by worship as people enjoy and are inspired by a majestic symphony, a beautiful painting, or by a great poem.

Study and Worship

In the chapters on the synagogue, we have seen how lessons from the scriptures were part of public worship among Jews from the beginning, and that in the Temple, too, portions of the Bible were read on certain occasions. When regulations for worship were issued by the Sanhedrin, it was specified that reading from the Torah and Prophets shall be part of the services on the Sabbath and on holidays. Later, the exact portion and chapter for each Sabbath and festival were prescribed. This custom has continued ever since. Study of the Bible and sermons by learned men are part of public worship in every synagogue whether Orthodox, Conservative or Reform.

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WHAT JEWS HAVE PRAYED FOR

Prayer having always been a constant companion of the Jew in his daily life, it was natural that he should have expressed in prayer his feelings and ideas about everything that he treasured in life: God, nature, family, country, Torah, peace, freedom, justice. Jews have prayed because they strove to sanctify life, to make living worthwhile and beautiful. As a religious people, they sought to communicate with God and to receive His love and protection. The prayerbook is a mirror which reflects the soul of the Jew, his beliefs and hopes.

Jewish prayers may be divided into three categories: prayers of thanksgiving, of praise to God, and of petition or supplication. The prayer chanted in the synagogue on the Sabbath when Rosh Hodesh is announced, for example, is a supplication imploring the Almighty to grant every Jew the things he cherishes most:

“O grant us long life; a life of peace, goodness and blessing; a life of sufficient livelihood and of bodily strength; a life of fear of God and fear of sin; a life free from shame and reproach; a life of prosperity and honor; a life of love of Torah and of piety; a life in which the desires of our heart shall be fulfilled for good. He who performed miracles for our ancestors and redeemed them from slavery to freedom, may He speedily redeem us and gather our exiles from the four corners of the earth. All Jews are comrades.”

The Shmoneh Esreh

Shmoneh Esreh is a prayer both of petition and thanksgiving. It is one of the earliest prayers, dating back to the times of the Maccabees, and is repeated at every service.

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Shmoneh Esreh means eighteen and is so called because it contains eighteen parts.* It is also known as Amidah, since the congregation is expected to stand while reciting it. Each part begins with a supplication or request and concludes with a benediction of thanksgiving.

In the Shmoneh Esreh the Jew supplicates God and thanks Him for knowledge and understanding, for repentance and forgiveness, for health and prosperity, for protection from enemies and traitors, for support of community leaders and teachers; for a return to Palestine, the rebuilding of Jerusalem and its Temple, and the restoration of the Jewish government; for justice and everlasting peace. The Shmoneh Esreh contains also the Kedushah hymn in which the name of God is sanctified. On the Sabbath and on all holidays, only the first three and the last three parts of the week-day Shmoneh Esreh are retained, while in place of the omitted sections special prayers pertaining to the occasion are recited.

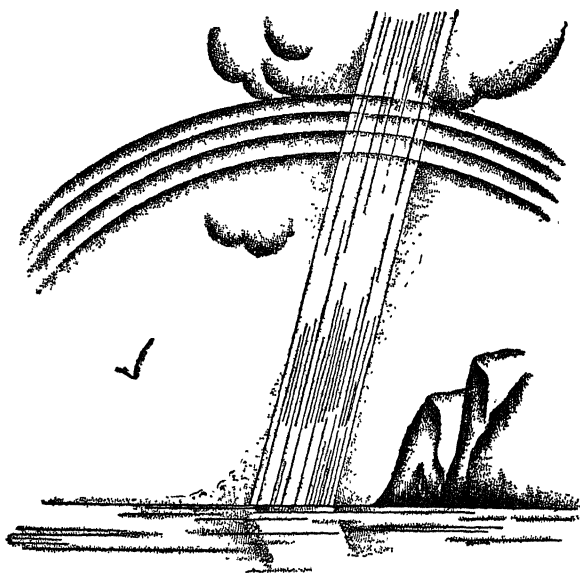
The Benedictions

Thankfulness has been one of the chief traits of the Jew. The pious Jew thanks God for the bread he eats and the water he drinks; for lofty mountains, great deserts and wide seas; for lightning, thunder and the rainbow; for beautiful trees and animals; for fragrant spices, plants and fruits; for giving wisdom to man; for life and for death. These are the Berachot or benedictions to be recited in connection with each of the foregoing. The best known Berachah of thanksgiving, known as Sheheheyanu, is:

“Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe who has kept us in life, and has preserved us, and hast enabled us to reach this season.”

* Actually there are nineteen, the last one having been added later on.

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Most prayers are hymns in praise of God. The Jew has felt that by praising and exalting God he was exalting himself. By describing the greatness of the Almighty, man has sought to impart greatness to himself. By ascribing to God the qualities of love, mercy, justice, kindness and forgiveness, man has striven to make these traits part of himself.

The Kaddish

Kaddish is the great hymn of praise to God, and has become the most sacred prayer in the Jewish liturgy. Originally, it was recited after studying a selection of the Agadah. Later, it became customary to say Kaddish upon the death of a great scholar. During the terrible persecutions in the Middle Ages, particularly in Germany, its use increased and spread. It would seem that the Jews could best

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express their feelings in times of greatest catastrophe by exalting God. This explains why the Kaddish has become the prayer of mourning, recited at the burial, when laying the tombstone, and at memorial services. It is said by the Hazan, however, at each and every service. The Kaddish speaks of the greatness of God, of redemption from exile, and of everlasting peace in Messianic times.

The Shema

The famous Shema prayers, which begin with the words "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one," give voice in beautiful language to the belief in one God and in love of God; to the importance of Torah and learning; to the idea of holiness, or the sacredness of life; to the significance of light as indicating the divine power in nature. Three times daily these prayers taught the Jew that good conduct is essential for happiness; that the Tzitzit or fringes stand for the universality of God; that the Tefillin are worn on the head and next to the heart so that the teachings of Judaism may be "in your heart and in your soul." The Shema also repeats the belief in redemption from exile and a return to Palestine. Like the Shmoneh Esreh, the Shema is an old prayer recited as far back as Second Temple days. All of the selections were taken from the Torah.*

Other prayers, too, contain the beliefs and principles of Judaism. The famous YIGDAL is a poetic version of Maimonides' "Thirteen Principles of Faith." The ADON OLAM, composed by Solomon ibn Gabirol, is a beautiful poem voicing Israel's faith in God. Then there are the many psalms, those beautiful religious poems exalting God and the divine power. The Hallel prayer, chanted on Rosh Hodesh, Hanukah and the three pilgrimage festivals, consists of some of the

* Deuteronomy VI, 4-9; XI, 13-20. Numbers XV, 37-41.

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most inspiring psalms in the Bible. For every holiday, there are special prayers which pertain to the occasion and explain its significance. Many selections of the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur liturgies are particularly poetic and inspiring.

Prayers in the Plural

Because the Jews have emphasized public or communal worship from ancient times on, Jewish prayers, with few exceptions, are worded in the plural rather than in the singular. It was natural when praying together to say: "Our God" rather than "My God"; "Grant us peace" instead of "Grant me peace." The Jew has prayed not merely for himself but for his fellow men as well. Since it is within the power of every person, says the Talmud, to beseech God on behalf of another individual, not to do so would be wrong, for "all Jews are responsible for one another." Reciting these prayers on behalf of all Israel, every day without exception, has served to maintain the sense of unity and of mutual responsibility among the Jewish people throughout the ages.

Praying in Hebrew

With the exception of a few prayers in Aramaic, until recent times, all public worship among Jews was exclusively in Hebrew. In their own privacy, men, women or children would naturally petition God in the language they knew best. But in the synagogue only Hebrew was permitted as the language of communal worship. Praying in one common language has given the Jews of each generation the feeling of being part of one united people. The Hebrew prayers, in turn, have helped preserve the language and to assure a knowledge of Hebrew among the Jews of every community on earth.

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In modern times Jews have begun to translate the Hebrew prayers and to introduce these translations into the service. Reform Jews of America now use more English than Hebrew in their worship, claiming that people should pray in the language they understand best. To this argument orthodox Jews reply: "Go and learn" Hebrew, pointing to the importance of Hebrew in the past and asserting that Hebrew is equally indispensable today.

SYMBOLIC ARTICLES OF PRAYER

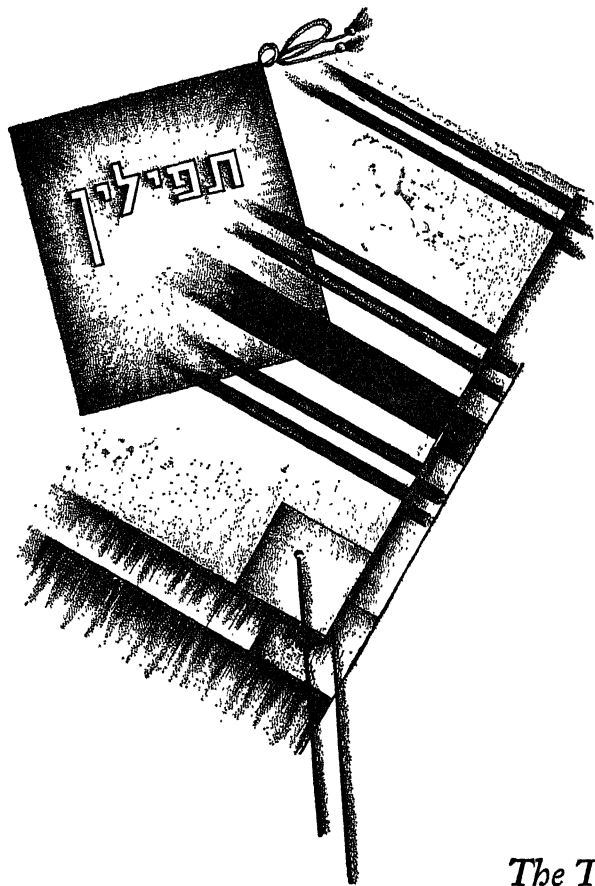
Praying has been considered a sacred obligation. "Remember that you stand before God when you pray," says the Talmud. Maimonides explained this to mean that one should be free of all petty thoughts and regard himself as if the presence of God were before him. "He who prays must direct his whole mind to Heaven," and recite each prayer with real Kavanah or intention. This does not imply solemnity or sadness. On the contrary, prayer is a Simhah shel Mitzvah, a commandment to be performed in a spirit of joy and gladness.

Prayer has been a sacred and joyous act because it is considered the highest form of worship, "a service of the heart." The beautiful language of the prayers and the great ideals of their contents inspired the Jew with hope and confidence. The manner in which he has prayed — with deep concentration and even abandon — enabled him to perform the Mitzvah with religious fervor. The sacred objects and symbols in the synagogue helped create the necessary atmosphere for devout worship.

When the Orthodox Jew puts on the Tallit and Tefillin for the morning service, he feels so much more in the mood

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of worshipping and is able to concentrate the better on his inner purpose. The Tallit with its Tzitzit or fringes, and the Tefillin with their contents, are in themselves symbols of ethical ideals and Jewish aspirations.



The Tallit

The Tallit or prayer-shawl recalls the style of upper garment worn in ancient Palestine. Even today one

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sees white abayahs or robes with wide stripes worn by the Arabs. It was customary for the rabbis in those days to wear special robes as a sign of distinction. After the dispersion, Jews usually adopted the dress styles of the peoples among whom they lived, while the ancient Palestinian garment and particularly the honorary robe of the rabbis, the Tallit, came to be used as a sacred vestment for ritual purposes.

The religious significance of the Tallit lies especially in the Tzitzit or fringes at each of its four corners. The Bible prescribes "that they make them a fringe upon the corners of their garments . . . that ye may look upon it and remember the commandments of the Lord." * In olden times, these fringes were worn on the outer garments in daily use. Later on, due to fear of persecution, perhaps, a small undergarment with fringes was substituted for the old custom. Known as Tallit Katan or small Tallit, and also as Arba Kanfot or four corners, it has been worn by Jews unto this day. The Tzitzit, being a symbol and reminder of the commandments, were adopted also for the Tallit.

While the Arba Kanfot is part of the pious Jew's daily clothes, the Tallit is worn only at prayer — at all morning services on week-days, Sabbath and holidays, and also on the eve of Kol Nidre. The Tallit may be of any cloth, provided the fringes are of the same material. Today the Tallit is either of wool or silk. The stripes are usually blue,** although some have black bands as a sign of mourning after the fall of the Jewish state and the destruction of the Temple. Along the upper part, just across the neck, the Tallit is decorated with an embroidered ribbon. While use of the

* Numbers XV, 37-41.

** The Zionist flag of blue and white stripes was inspired by the Tallit. The sky-blue stands for heaven; the white for peace and purity.

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Tallit is not obligatory until after marriage, most American boys begin wearing it upon becoming Bar Mitzvah.

Another ritual garment is the long white robe called the Kittel. In the Middle Ages, when most Jews appeared in black, this white robe was worn all day on Saturdays in honor of the Sabbath. Later its use was limited to the "Seder" on Pesach and to the High Holy Days in the synagogue. It was also worn by the bridegroom at his wedding. Today, many Jews wear the Kittel on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur in the synagogue, and at the Seder. It is also used as Tachrichin in which the dead are buried. Having lived as a Jew, it is natural to be buried in a distinctive Jewish garment.

The Tefillin

Upon reaching the age of thirteen, boys put on Tefillin during morning week-day prayers. This custom also is based on a Biblical commandment, which says: "And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thy hand and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes." The phylacteries too were part of daily dress in ancient times, and were later adopted for ritual purposes. One Tefillin is worn on the head, the other on the left-hand bicep, pointing to the heart, reminding the Jew to observe the laws and customs with all one's heart and mind.

Each of the two Tefillin consists of a little square box with a long strap attached to it. In the head phylactery are found four strips of parchment, each in a separate compartment. On one strip, written in Hebrew, is a quotation from the Bible bidding the Jews to remember their liberation from slavery and to celebrate the Passover; on the second, a quotation regarding the redemption of the first-born; the

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third and fourth strips contain two Shema prayers.* The arm phylactery has only one strip, with all four selections on it. Each of the two phylacteries has a Hebrew letter stamped on it, a SHIN on the head-piece and a YAD on the arm-piece; while the strap of the head phylactery is tied in the back into a knot shaped like the Hebrew letter Dalet. The three Hebrew letters spell the word SHADDAI which means Almighty.

The skull-cap, worn by traditional Jews at prayer, has also evidently come down to us from ancient times. While in Western countries, taking off the hat is considered a sign of respect, Arabs and other Oriental peoples cover their heads on occasions when they wish to show respect and also at prayer. This was evidently true among the ancient Jews too. The usual head-dress being too heavy and warm to wear at services, a small light skull-cap was introduced in time. Pious Jews never go hatless because they consider man to be at all times in the presence of God. The skull-cap worn by the Hazan adds much to the dignity of his appearance.

Prayer has been a constant companion of the Jewish people from earliest times because as a religious people the Jews have sought to sanctify life and to imbue themselves with the spirit of God. They were the first people to discover a form of worship which did not depend on any designated place, on priests, or on sacrifices.

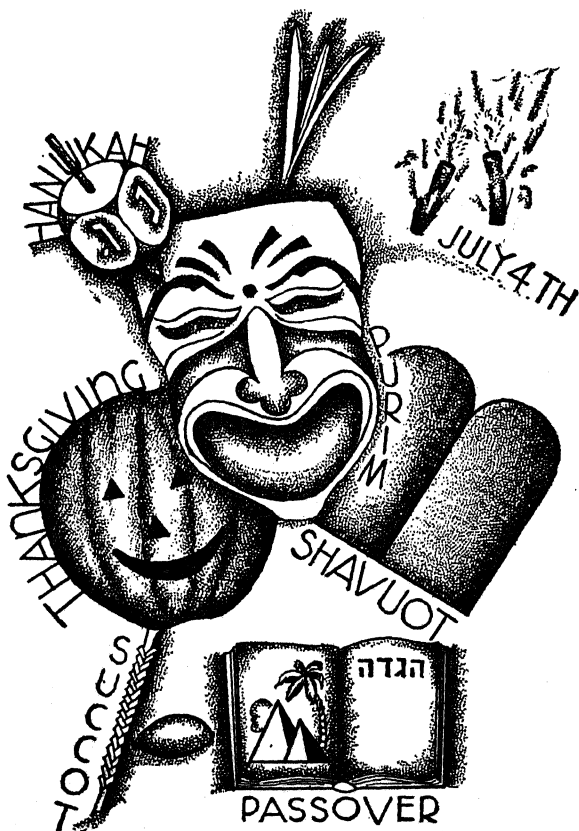
It took many centuries to develop the prayer services. The emphasis on public worship, and later, the necessity of keeping the Jewish people united, gave rise to regular services at stated times in every Jewish community. When the

* Exodus 13, 1-10; 11-16; Deuteronomy 6, 4-9; 11, 13-20.

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art of printing was invented, standard, uniform prayerbooks were adopted voluntarily by world Jewries.

The Jewish prayers are literature, composed by poets, prophets and scholars over a period of three thousand years. In beautiful language, they express the beliefs of the Jewish people and their hopes for Israel and for all mankind. Morning, afternoon and evening, on the Sabbath, on holidays, and on many special occasions as they arise, the Jew has given voice in prayer to personal and communal needs, to his feeling of thanksgiving for the good things in life, and to his praises and exaltations of God. Prayer has been indeed a welcome Mitzvah to be performed with reverence and joy.



Chapter Twelve

THE HOLIDAYS

THE Sabbath brings rest, joy and beauty to the Jew every week. Once a month Rosh Hodesh occurs, with its message of thanksgiving. Less often, but always welcome, come the

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holidays and festivals, each in its own season. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are occasions for prayer and contemplation. Succot is the time for impressive ceremonies and enjoyable celebrations. Hanukah brings lights, dreidels, parties. Purim unpacks masks, carnivals and Hamantaschen. Pesach — but no need enumerating all. Each holiday is an important event. It is no wonder that being a Jew has meant so much in past generations and means so much today.

Each holiday tells an impressive story from the long and eventful history of the Jewish people. Pesach recalls the heroic exodus from Egypt; Shavuot the giving of the Law; Succot, the journey to the Promised Land; Hanukah, the brave Maccabees; Lag Beomer, the desperate revolt of Bar Cochba. These and the other holidays enable the Jews of every generation to live over again those historical events, and to feel themselves a link in the chain of Jewish history, carrying on the traditions and heritage of Israel.

Each festival, also, conveys its particular message to the Jew. Pesach stands for liberty and equality; Shavuot for learning and knowledge; Succot for soil and pioneering; Hanukah, for devotion to Israel and its faith; Rosh Hashanah for religion. The holidays serve to keep alive the ideals and aspirations which Jews have learned to treasure deeply.

While learning about the holidays and when observing them, the Jews of all the world felt themselves united with one another, having a common history, a common faith and a common destiny. The holidays foster fellowship and community life among Jews and thereby play a vital role in the perpetuation of the people and their heritage.

In this chapter, the holidays will be described briefly, each in its place on the Jewish calendar. The Sabbath and Rosh Hodesh will also be treated. In addition, the American

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national holidays and the new Palestinian anniversaries will be given their rightful place in the Jewish year.

THE SABBATH

Of all the Jewish observances, the Sabbath is the only one prescribed by the Ten Commandments, being one of the earliest and most cherished of Jewish customs. Indeed, the Jews were the first people to set aside the seventh day for rest from work, and the Sabbath is one of Israel's great contributions to mankind. Throughout the centuries, the Jews have celebrated it every week as a day of rest and freedom, and as a period of worship and study.

In our own times, the Sabbath is not observed by all Jews alike, but in millions of Jewish homes throughout the world, Shabbat is truly a family festival. The moment the candles are lit, the Sabbath spirit is felt by everyone. The evening meal, with the Kiddush, the Zemirot or chants, and the good food bring peace and relaxation. Everyone seems more kindly and considerate. This is perhaps what our sages meant when they said that on Shabbat one has a Neshamah Yeterah or an over-soul.

After the festive meal, the family spends the evening quietly at home. Some go to the synagogue for services. The late evening service is a new Sabbath custom which has developed in America. In Palestine, lectures, study groups, and community sings are popular on Friday nights.

On Sabbath morning, those who do not work go to synagogue to pray, listen to the rabbi's sermon, and meet friends. Reading the Sidrah or portion of the week from the Torah and a selection from the Prophets is an important part of the service. The noon meal is eaten leisurely, with Zemirot

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between courses. The afternoon is spent reading, playing quiet games, entertaining guests, visiting a museum, going for a walk, or just relaxing at home. There are ever so many interesting things to do on Shabbat which do not require the use of money, traveling, or boisterous play. Synagogue, Centers and clubs often conduct an Oneg Shabbat, a new custom introduced by the Hebrew poet Bialik in Palestine. The Seudah Shelishit or Third Meal is also to be seen in many synagogues. After sunset, the Sabbath is bade farewell at home with the impressive Havdalah ceremony.

The Sabbath is a weekly reminder and symbol of the finer things in life. All week we are preoccupied with school, with house duties, with earning a livelihood. Shabbat is the time to think of ideals and of better ways of living, for the Sabbath stands for personal happiness and for the achievement of an improved social order. The Sabbath is also essential for the preservation of the Jewish people and of their heritage. The great Jewish thinker, Ahad Haam, has said: "More than the Jews have kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath has kept the Jewish people."

ROSH HODESH

Shabbat comes once a week with its message of freedom and idealism. Rosh Hodesh occurs once every month, as the name which means First of the Month, indicates. Its message is one of thanksgiving for the return of the good things in life and for the orderly universe in which we live.

It is believed that in ancient times Rosh Hodesh was even more essential than the Sabbath as a day of rest and festivity. The moon occupied an important place in the life of our ancestors in Palestine. They counted the months, weeks and

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days by the moon. Since they had no written calendar, the appearance of the tiniest crescent in the sky meant the beginning of a new month. It was announced with blowing of the Shofar and with fire signals, and was celebrated with rest from work, sacrificial ceremonies, and home festivities.

Rosh Hodesh has been observed since those ancient times to this day. On the Sabbath before Rosh Hodesh, special prayers are offered in the synagogue, and the beginning of the month is announced by the cantor. On Rosh Hodesh proper, the famous Hallel psalms, expressing praise of God, thanksgiving, and hopefulness are recited, as well as other special selections. Before the Musaf service, a portion of the Bible is read. At home, the meal is more festive, and in general the spirit of a half-holiday prevails in many homes.

In the schools of Palestine, Rosh Hodesh is observed with special assemblies and programs. Important events of the preceding month are reviewed, forthcoming occasions are discussed, and announcement of the moneys collected for the Jewish National Fund and other causes are made. This custom is spreading to Jewish schools and clubs in other countries including America.

ROSH HASHANAH

The Jewish year begins with Rosh Hashanah, on the first and second days of the month Tishri, which usually falls in September. It is a time of the year when children and youth go back to school and adults settle down for a long season of work. In ancient days, too, this was the beginning of the economic year and was therefore an appropriate time for the New Year holiday.

Rosh Hashanah is universally observed by all types of Jews, and together with Yom Kippur constitute the two

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holiest days in the Jewish calendar. The sanctity of the day is felt most at the morning service in the synagogue. The ritual, included in the special prayerbook or Mahzor, makes one appreciate the significance of the day as only great, inspiring poems can. The Shofar ceremony is an unforgettable experience. The most important selections are those which describe God as Judge, King, and Lawgiver. The reading from the Torah, the rabbi's sermon, and the characteristic melodies chanted by the cantor and choir, all lend beauty and meaning to the service.

Rosh Hashanah has a fourfold meaning. It is the New Year, the Day of Remembrance, the Day of Judgment, and the Day of Shofar Blowing. On Rosh Hashanah, the Jew examines his past deeds and thoughts, and prays that God remember him kindly. For it is a Day of Judgment when man passes before his Creator, and his actions and conduct are evaluated. As a Day of Shofar Blowing, it is a time when the Jew reviews the history of his people and prays that Israel find contentment and rebuild the homeland in Palestine, and that everlasting peace and goodness come to all mankind.

Rosh Hashanah is also New Year's Day. The greeting-cards, the prayers in the synagogue, dipping the bread in honey, and the other customs are intended to express hope that the year ahead will bring joy and gladness to us personally, to our family and friends, to all of Israel, and to the whole world.

YOM KIPPUR

Yom Kippur is the final day of the Solemn Season which begins with Rosh Hashanah, and is the most sacred to Jews the world over, "the Sabbath of Sabbaths." Long before

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sunset, everyone is at home preparing for the fast-meal and for the Kol Nidre service. Persons not on speaking terms make peace with one another, for the prayers and fasting on Yom Kippur atone only for wrongs committed against God. /

Finally, the family gathers around the table to partake of the meal which is to sustain those who will fast until the following day after sunset. Words are few while eating and are uttered with a peculiar tenderness. Everyone is absorbed in contemplation of the sacred twenty-four hours ahead. In many homes, before leaving for the synagogue, the father blesses his children.

In the House of Worship a sacred atmosphere prevails, for Kol Nidre night is holy night. The Scrolls of the Law are taken out and the cantor begins to sing the famous Kol Nidre prayer in the equally noted and beautiful melody. Thrice he chants, the congregation repeating after him. Later, the Al Het or Confessions are recited and the forgiveness of God is petitioned by all. Another impressive selection, among the many recited on this night, is one which compares man to various kinds of materials and God to a master craftsman.

The services on the following day continue the sentiments of repentance and forgiveness. The liturgy includes a Memorial Service for departed relatives, the Avodah or Sacred Service which recalls the sacrifices and ceremonies in the ancient Temple at Jerusalem, readings from the Torah and the Prophets, and the rabbi's sermon. Late in the afternoon comes the Neilah or closing service. At the very last, one long, hopeful note is resounded by the Shofar, symbolizing for the Jew the struggles and achievements of the past and a promise of happiness in the future.

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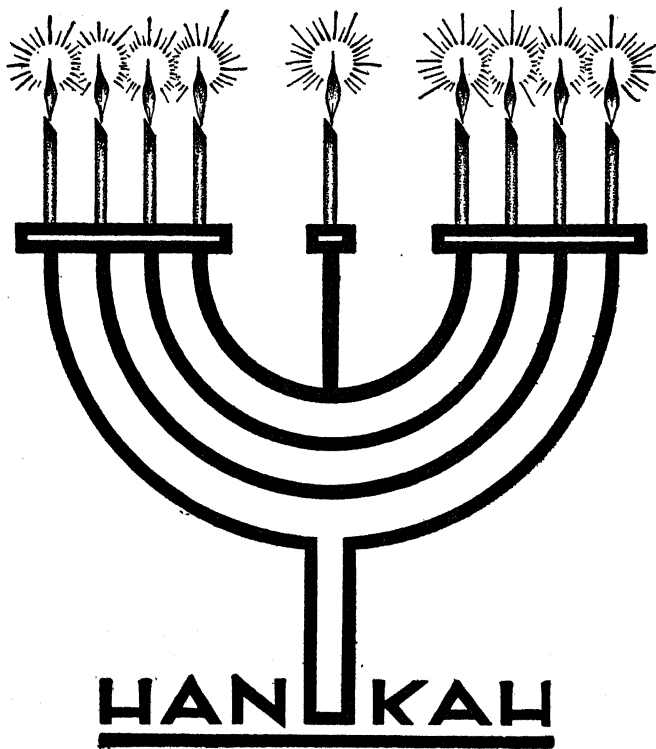
SUCCOT

On the holiday of Succot or Feast of Tabernacles, the Jew relives many eventful, heroic pages from his history. He recalls the momentous journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, when his people lived in tents and booths. He is reminded of the agricultural life of the Jews in ancient Palestine, the harvest season, and the pilgrimage to the sacred Temple at Jerusalem. Succot, or rather the last day known as Simhat Torah, also reviews for the Jew the great role which Torah and learning have played in Jewish life from one generation to another. Succot, then, is a historical anniversary, an agricultural holiday and a Torah festival.

The customs and ceremonies of Succot symbolize its threefold meaning. The Succah or booth is reminiscent of the temporary dwellings in the desert during the wanderings to Palestine, as well as of the harvesters' huts in the orchards and fields of that land. The Lulav and Etrog employed in the Succot ritual also stand for the fruit harvest in Palestine, and at the same time they recall the beautiful Succot ceremonies in the ancient Temple. The Hakafot or Procession with the Scrolls in the synagogues on Simhat Torah, and other customs of the last day, express the love of the Jewish people for their heritage, and their determination to seek guidance and inspiration from the Torah.

In modern Palestine, during Succot, the Jews celebrate also the achievements of the new pioneers or Halutzim who are converting marshes, stony hillsides and bare sand dunes into flourishing fields, gardens and orchards, establishing colonies and building cities. And Jews the world over share with their brethren in Palestine this new meaning of Succot.

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HANUKAH

On Hanukkah we celebrate the Maccabean victory twenty-one centuries ago. That generation of loyal Jews faced two enemies: one external, the other internal. The external enemy was the Syrian empire, headed by Antiochus, which attempted to destroy the Jewish nation in Palestine and to eradicate its religion. The internal enemy was the Hellen-

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ists or assimilationist Jews who abandoned their own faith and culture and supported the Syrians. Judah Maccabee and his followers won because of their devotion to Judaism and their extraordinary bravery.

/ Ever since that victory, Jews have set aside eight days each year, beginning on the twenty-fifth of Kislev, to give thanks for and draw inspiration from that great event as told in the Books of the Maccabees and other sources. Each night, the Hanukiah or Hanukah Menorah is lighted to recall the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem when the sacred Menorah in the sanctuary was relit with the oil from the miraculous little jug, and to give thanks for the great miracle of the survival of the Jewish people all these centuries despite continuous wandering and persecution. At the services during the week, the Al Hannisim prayer and the Hallel psalms are recited. Games with the Dreidel or Hanukah top are played. Children receive Hanukah Gelt, part of which they donate to a worthy cause. At family feasts, dairy dishes, including pancakes, are eaten. Schools, synagogues and Centers present plays and concerts. Young men and women observe Jewish National Fund Flag Day by collecting money to purchase land in Palestine.

The message of Hanukah is as meaningful now as ever in the past. Today, too, assimilationists are undermining the existence of the Jewish people and of Judaism. As in those days millions of our brethren are persecuted for no other reason than that they are Jews. But at present, as in Maccabean times, a brave, determined effort is being made to regain Palestine as the Jewish homeland, and Jews everywhere are standing guard to protect their brethren, to give them help, and to work for the enrichment of the Jewish religion and culture.

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HAMISHAH ASAR

Shevat, the Hebrew month approximating February, marks the beginning of Spring in Palestine. In ancient times, the fifteenth of Shevat was celebrated as the New Year of the Trees or Arbor Day. A cedar was planted for every boy born that year, and a cypress for every girl infant. When the children were married, branches of the trees were used as poles for the Hupah or canopy. As an agricultural people, our ancestors lived close to nature and treasured the trees for their fruit, beauty, and other uses.

After the Jews were banished from Palestine, they continued to observe Hamishah Asar Bishevat, or the Fifteenth of Shevat, by eating Palestinian fruit and by recalling the agricultural life of the Jews in ancient Palestine, thereby keeping alive their love of Zion and their hope of rebuilding it. Hamishah Asar was primarily a children's holiday, celebrated in the schools with parties, banquets, and even picnics in the Oriental countries.

Today, the ancient custom of planting trees on this occasion is being observed again in Palestine. In every village and city where Jews live, the school children and youth plant trees in an impressive ceremonial fashion. Throughout the world, the day is celebrated by eating Palestinian fruit, conducting entertainments and programs about the new life in Palestine, and contributing money to plant forests and groves in the old-new land. In many communities, it is celebrated as Palestine Day.

The story of Hamishah Asar is in a sense the story of Israel's love for Palestine and the dream of tilling its fields and tending its orchards once again. For many centuries, this holiday has been to the Jews a harbinger of Spring and of hope for a brighter future. Now that Palestine is being

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rebuilt, Hamishah Asar has become a day of planting, of spreading knowledge about the achievements in Palestine, and of raising funds to replant the mountains, plains, and valleys of Eretz Yisrael.

JOLLY PURIM

Purim is the jolliest of all holidays. Only Simhat Torah compares with it in joy and fun. On Simhat Torah, Jews show how happy they are with the Torah; on Purim they make merry to express the confidence that they will outlive every Haman.

The story of Purim, so interestingly told in the Book of Esther, is well known. There we read of Haman's plot to destroy the Jews of Persia and Media, and how Mordecai and Esther saved the day, enabling the Jews to defend themselves and to turn the threatened massacre into a victory. Ever since then, the thirteenth day of the Hebrew month Adar has been celebrated as Purim. The word Purim means lots, for Haman had chosen the date for the annihilation of the Jews by casting lots.

In the home, Purim is observed with Shalachmanot — exchanging gifts and donating gifts to the poor; with a Purim Seudah or family feast at which the three-cornered Hamantaschen cakes and other characteristic foods are eaten; and with general fun consisting of songs, Purim games and charades, and other entertainment. In the synagogue, the Megillah or scroll, containing the Book of Esther, is read in the evening, and the following morning. Schools, clubs, Centers and synagogues present plays, arrange mask-balls, and hold indoor carnivals. In Palestine, and particularly in Tel Aviv, Purim is observed with large

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outdoor carnivals, in addition to the traditional customs.

Purim each year bids the Jew have courage and hope. There have been Hamans before; the Jews have survived them all. We shall outlive the Hamans of this generation as well. Jews must not depend on miracles, however, but must fight the evil on many fronts — by working for peace and democracy in the world; by rebuilding Palestine; by helping the victims of persecution to find new homes; by improving and strengthening Jewish life in every home and every community; and by performing our duties as citizens loyally and intelligently.



PASSOVER

The experiences and ordeals of slavery in Egypt, and the Exodus following it, have burned themselves deeply into the memory of the Jewish people, and Pesach, the

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holiday which commemorates those experiences, has been observed with care and devotion for over three thousand years. Remember, says the Bible repeatedly, that "thou wast a slave in Egypt." Therefore, be fair to the stranger, treat your servants and other employees decently, honor your parents, do not mistreat even dumb animals. At every Seder, in every Jewish home, for many centuries, Jews have repeated the statement from the Talmud: "In every generation, every Jew should see himself as if it were he who was redeemed from slavery in Egypt."¹

In ancient Palestine, Passover was celebrated as a twofold holiday. It was the feast of freedom and also the Spring agricultural festival, marking the beginning of the grain harvest. The Omer ceremony, consisting of the offering of a sheaf of newly cut barley, heralded officially the beginning of the grain harvest. The Paschal lamb and the Matzot symbolized the great Exodus when the Hebrews were emancipated from slavery. Pesach was one of the three great pilgrimage festivals when Jews from all parts of the country as well as from neighboring lands came to the Temple in Jerusalem.

When the Jews ceased to live as a nation in Palestine, they continued to cling to the ideals for which Pesach stands and to observe the festival with great zeal. Both the national and agricultural meanings of the holiday remained. Though dispersed and living in exile, they longed for liberty and independence. Exile was considered a kind of slavery. They prayed for freedom to live as Jews without fear of persecution.

And so Pesach has come down to us as the most important Jewish festival of all, with the Seder as the dramatic event of the whole holiday. A special collection of prayers and

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songs, called the Haggadah, was composed. While chanting the Haggadah, eating the Matzot, bitter herbs and brick-like Haroset, dipping the parsley into the salt water, and performing the other home and synagogue customs, the Jews of today relive in imagination that period of enslavement and liberation, and are inspired with the ideals for which Pesach stands.

LAG BEOMER

Lag Beomer, the youngest of all Jewish festivals, recalls the last attempt of our ancestors to reestablish an independent nation in Palestine. Not until modern times have the Jews made any serious attempt to rebuild Palestine. On Lag Beomer we remember the bravery of Bar Cochba and his followers who about sixty years after the burning and destruction of the Second Temple, made a bold effort to regain Palestine from the hands of the Romans. We recall the equal bravery of Akiba, Bar Yohai, and other scholars who upheld the right of the Jews to study the Torah and to live in accordance with its teachings.

The story of Lag Beomer lives on in its customs. Children and youth hold picnics where they play with bows and arrows to recall Bar Cochba and his brave followers. We sing songs about Simeon Bar Yohai who risked his life rather than cease teaching the Jewish Law. In Palestine, an impressive festival of bonfires, dancing and singing takes place at Meron, where Bar Yohai is said to have hid in a cave from the Romans, and where he died. Throughout the country, bonfires are lit on Lag Beomer eve. In America and other countries, indoor campfires and other kinds of programs are arranged by schools and clubs.

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Lag Beomer is also a day of weddings. The period between Pesach and Shavuot, known as Sefirah, or counting, is considered a period of mourning, in honor of thousands of Akiba's pupils who are said to have died from an epidemic during these weeks. The plague, according to tradition, stopped on Lag Beomer, which became a day for weddings and other festivities. Lag Beomer is also observed as Scholars' Day, in memory of Akiba, Bar Yohai and the other Jewish sages of the time. In many communities, Jewish book exhibits are held during the week when Lag Beomer occurs.

SHAVUOT

The meaning of Shavuot lives on its names and customs. The word Shavuot, or weeks, stands for the seven weeks of the grain harvest which began on Pesach and concluded with a great pilgrimage festival to Jerusalem. The pilgrims, who gathered in the thousands from all parts of the country, brought with them the first pickings of their grapes, figs, and pomegranates, as well as wheat, barley, olive oil and honey. The holiday, therefore, was also called Hag Habikurim or Festival of First Fruits. It was celebrated with home festivities throughout the country and with impressive ceremonies in the Temple.

It was also known as Zeman Matan Toratenu, the Season of the Giving of Our Law, commemorating the receiving of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, which proved to be such a great event in the history of the Jews and of all mankind. This meaning of Shavuot became especially important after the Jewish people lost Palestine and were dispersed throughout the world. For ever since then, the

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Torah, and Jewish learning in general, have been the lifeblood of the Jewish people without which they could not exist.

The Shavuot customs observed today symbolize both the agricultural and the religious significance of the holiday. Homes, synagogues and Centers are decorated with flowers and green foliage to recall the flora of Palestine. The Book of Ruth is read as a description of the grain harvest in ancient times. Cheese cakes, honey cakes and other dairy food are eaten to recall Palestine, which is described as "a land flowing with milk and honey." In modern Palestine, the ancient ceremony of First Fruits has been revived, for today again Jews are harvesting the fruits of the soil in the ancient land.

The honey and milk are also symbols of Torah and learning, for the Torah, our sages said, is sweet as honey and nourishing as milk to those who study it and live in accordance with its teachings. But there are other, special Torah customs. In the synagogue, the Ten Commandments and other appropriate selections from the Bible are read, and special prayers recited. Learned Jews study the Tikkun, an abridgment of the Bible and the Mishnah, in order to review the most important teachings of Judaism. Schools, community centers, synagogues and clubs arrange assemblies, concerts, plays and other celebrations dealing with both the religious and agricultural significance of the holiday. A new custom, confirmation, is observed in many temples and synagogues. For Shavuot is an appropriate occasion for celebrating the completion of one period in a child's education and the beginning of a new one, leading to a better knowledge of the history and religion of Israel.

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FAST DAYS

On Yom Kippur, Jews fast for religious reasons. Tishah Be'Av and the minor fasts are national memorial days — occasions to recall past calamities and to keep alive hope and courage. The American Memorial Day also serves this double purpose. When we pay tribute to the memory of the soldiers who sacrificed their lives in war, we rededicate ourselves to the ideals of liberty, equality, and union for which they gave their last measure of devotion. Likewise, on Tishah Be'Av and other fasts, Jews do not merely memorialize sad events, but also pray for the welfare of the Jewish people and for the rebuilding of Palestine.

The greatest misfortunes in the long and eventful history of the Jews are said to have occurred on Tishah Be'Av, or the ninth day of the Hebrew month Av: the destruction of the First Temple built by Solomon (in 586 B. C. E.); the burning down of the Second Temple by the Romans (in 70 C. E.); the defeat of Bar Cochba, under whose leadership the Jews made the last stand against the Romans (in 135 C. E.); the expulsion of the Jews from Spain (in 1492 C. E.). The minor fasts — Asarah Be'Tevet, Shivah Asar Be'Tamuz, and the Gedalyah Fast — are also connected with the loss of Palestine. Taanit Esther, on the day preceding Purim, is commemorated in honor of brave Esther who fasted for three days before going to Ahasuerus to plead for her people.

On the evening of Tishah Be'Av and the next morning, Jews gather in synagogues to chant lamentations, and recite appropriate hymns and prayers. Before entering the house of worship, everyone is expected to make a contribu-

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tion. After the morning service, it is customary to visit the cemetery. In Palestine, many Jews go to the Wailing Wall at Jerusalem, the only relic of the wall which surrounded the ancient Temple. Similar customs are observed on other Jewish fast days.

NEW ANNIVERSARY DAYS

The rebuilding of Palestine in modern times has given birth to new holidays, or rather anniversary days, observed in Palestine as well as by millions of Jews elsewhere.

The first anniversary to be authorized was Herzl Day, in honor of Theodor Herzl, founder of the modern Zionist movement, and one of the great Jews of all times. It is observed every year on Tammuz Twentieth, the day Herzl died in 1904. Zionists throughout the world arrange mass meetings to pay tribute to his memory and to review his teachings and accomplishments.

On November 2, 1917, another anniversary was born — Balfour Declaration Day. On that day, the British Government, issued the famous Balfour Declaration, recognizing the right of the Jews to Palestine, and promising to help in its restoration as the Homeland of the Jewish people. Since then, over a half million Jews have settled there.

The third anniversary commemorates Joseph Trumpeldor and all the pioneers who have given their lives for the rebuilding of the old-new land. It is observed on Adar Eleventh, the day Trumpeldor lost his life while defending the colony of Tel Hai in Upper Galilee, in 1920.

Hebrew University Day originated on April 1, 1925, when the new University in Jerusalem was officially opened. Since then, the Hebrew University has developed

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into a large institution of learning, where Jewish studies, the sciences, philosophy, education, languages and other subjects are taught by outstanding scholars.

Bialik Day is the most recent anniversary to come from Palestine. It is observed in honor of the great Hebrew poet Hayyim Nahman Bialik, who died on Tamuz Twenty-first, 1934. He is considered the greatest Jewish poet in many centuries, and more than any other individual expressed the feelings and aspirations of the Jewish people in modern times.

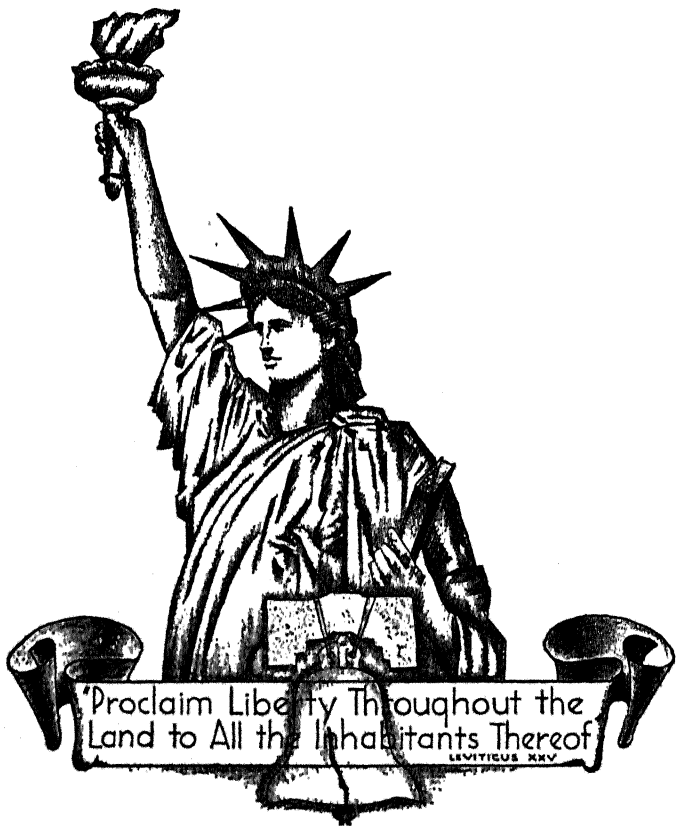
THE NATIONAL AMERICAN HOLIDAYS

Together with all Americans, the Jews of the United States celebrate the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving Day, Lincoln's Birthday, Washington's Birthday, Labor Day, Columbus Day and Memorial Day. Each festival brings its particular message to all citizens alike. Thanksgiving Day recalls the hardy pioneers who built this great and good country, while Independence Day reminds one of the birth of the American nation and of the ideals for which it stands. Washington's Birthday and Lincoln's Birthday are occasions to pay tribute to these great men and to draw inspiration from their lives.

As each holiday rolls around, we also like to think of its particular meaning to us as Jews, and of the Jew's share in the building of America. We compare the Fourth of July to Pesach, both being holidays of national birth. On Thanksgiving Day we remember the influence of the Bible on the Puritans and the Pilgrims, on the makers of the Constitution, and on American history in general. Each national holiday is an occasion for recalling the ideals of

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democracy, equality, religious liberty, and social justice for which America stands and which Jews have held very dear since ancient times. Even more important, they are days when we rededicate ourselves to these ideals. As Jews we know that only in a democracy can we enjoy freedom and peace, and we believe that the democratic way is the best way of life for all mankind.



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KEY TO PRONUNCIATION

ALL Hebrew terms in this index as well as throughout the book are spelled in accordance with the Sephardic pronunciation commonly used in Palestine. Pronounce: "a," as in father; "o," as in more; "e," as in met; "u," as in put; "i," as in hit.

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